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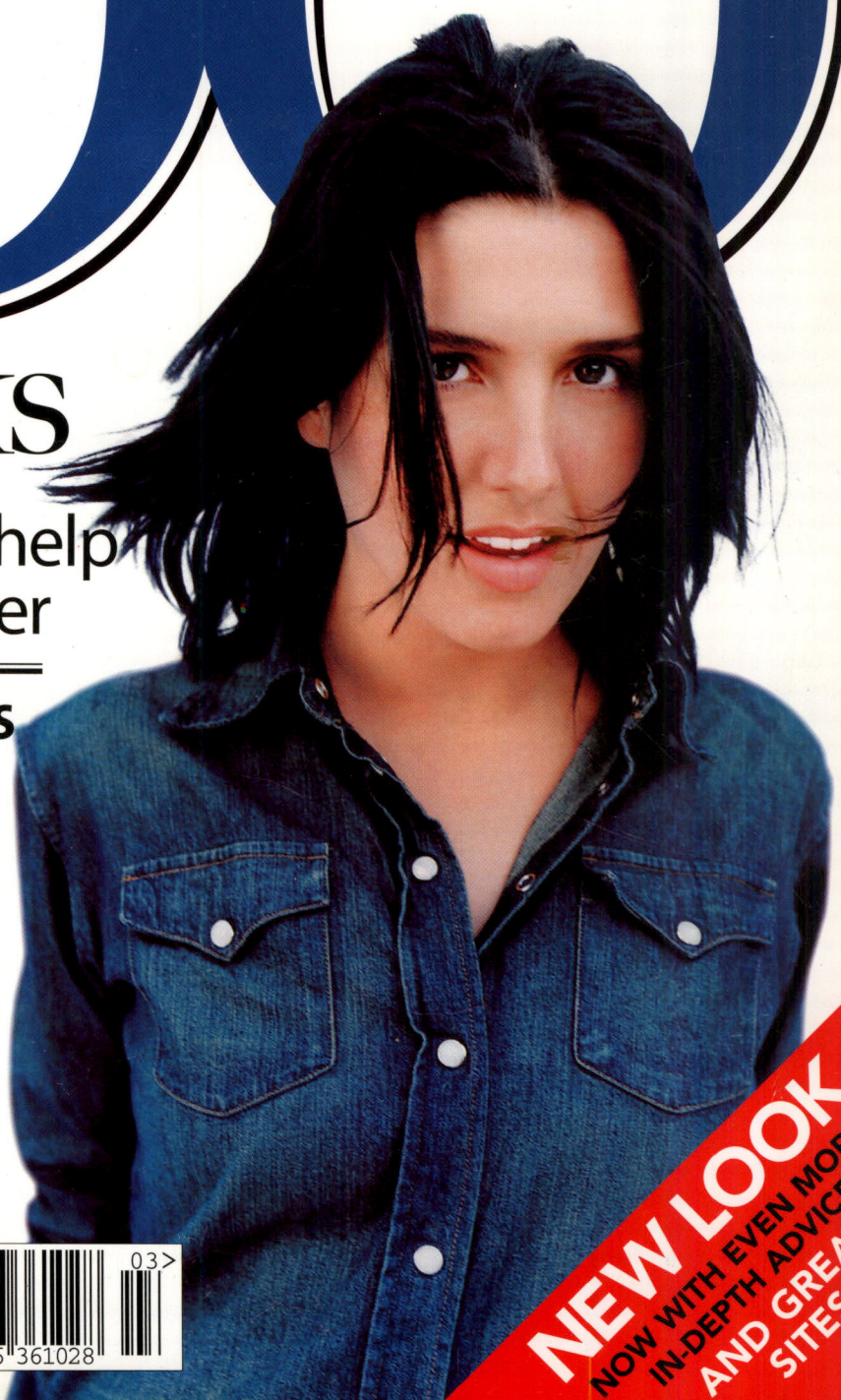

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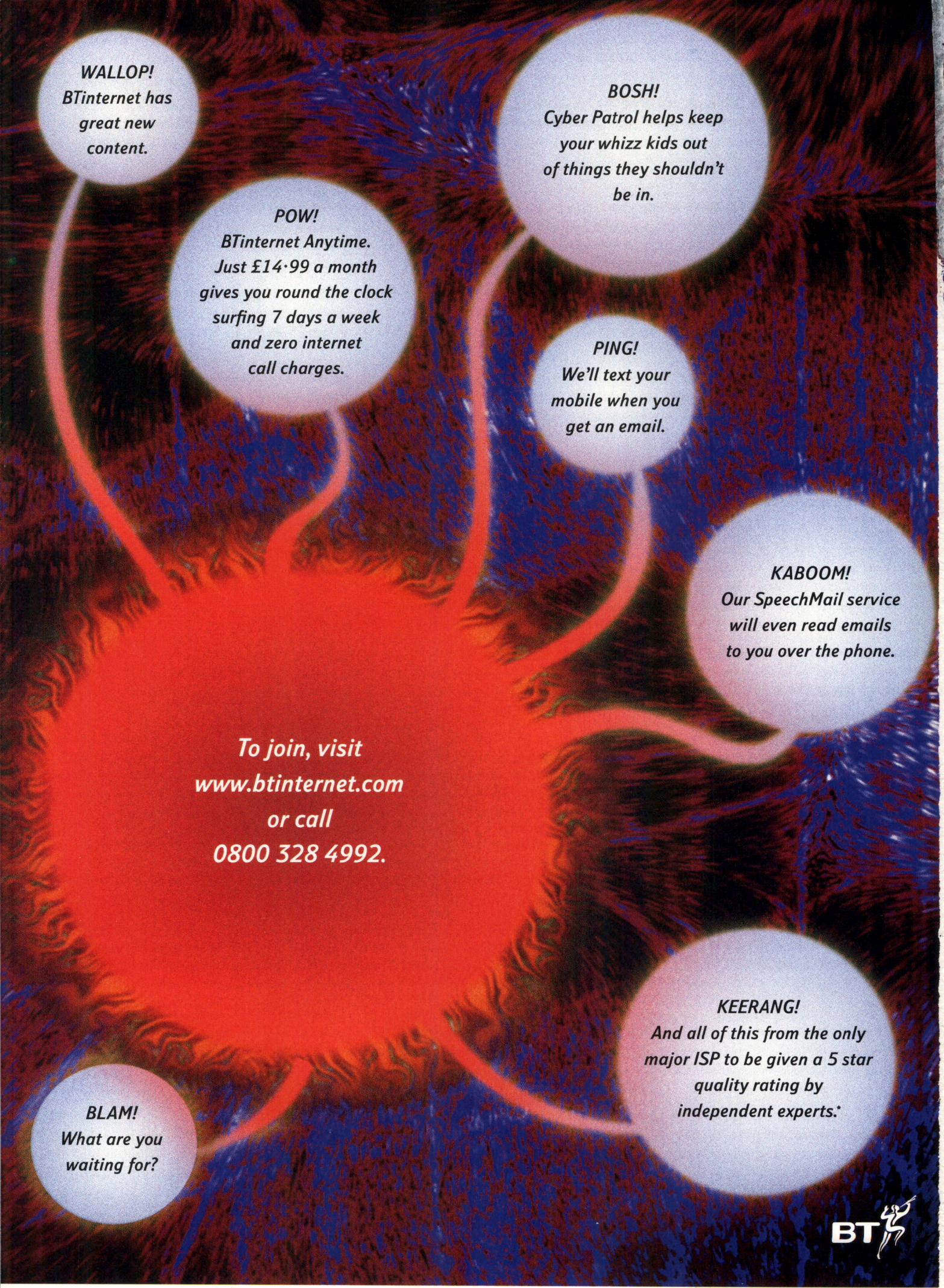

From April 2001 BTinternet Anytime requires a BT line or participating provider. *Study was taken by NetBasics November 2000 and is based on top 50 ISPs in the UK. The term 'major ISP' is based on 500,000 unmetered subscribers or more. Terms and conditions apply

ESSENTIALS

ABOUT US»

We're sworn to saving you time and money by bringing you the best of the Internet every month *and* giving technical advice that will make mastering the Net cheaper and easier.

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If you'd like to have our magazine delivered to your home every month – and save money in the process – just call 01795 414807 (see page 32 for more details).

NEED HELP?»

Got a technical query? Email *thenetnow@haynet.com*. The pressures of producing a monthly magazine mean that we can't answer every one, but we'll try to help where we can.

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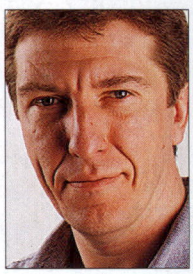
For more contact details and help, turn to page 23

:-) FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to *the net*, the UK's finest Internet magazine



If this is the first time you've encountered us, expect to spend a lot of your time online over the coming weeks – in every issue we promise to point you towards the very best Web sites and provide advice that will help you skit around cyberspace like a seasoned pro. If you're a regular reader, we hope you like the changes in this issue; we've included more in-depth technical advice, reviewed more hardware and software, and provided even greater depth in our site reviews.

Our aim is simple: the very facets that make the Internet so compelling (namely its scale and diversity) are also the things that can make it expensive and tricky to use. Which is where we come in. We'll save you time and money by guiding you to the very latest, smartest sites. And in our Advice Centre, you'll be sure to improve your understanding and ability to use the medium.

If you'd like proof, fast-forward to our 100 Tips and Tricks feature on page 116. We've assembled an incredible array of shortcuts that'll keep your money out of the telecoms companies' pockets.

Also in this month's Advice Centre is your potted guide to producing a pro-standard site in just 30 minutes. Yes, we know that it's an extreme claim. But our technical editor, Matt Chapman, has constructed a site that proves it.

What sort of site should you build? If you thought all of the good ideas had gone, turn to page 34, where we've asked some of the country's greatest Internet minds for the advice they'd give to someone with The Next Great Dot Com Idea.

If you've any comments or feel strongly about anything you read in the magazine, feel free to email me at the address below.

Mark Payton, **EDITOR**
mark.payton@haynet.com

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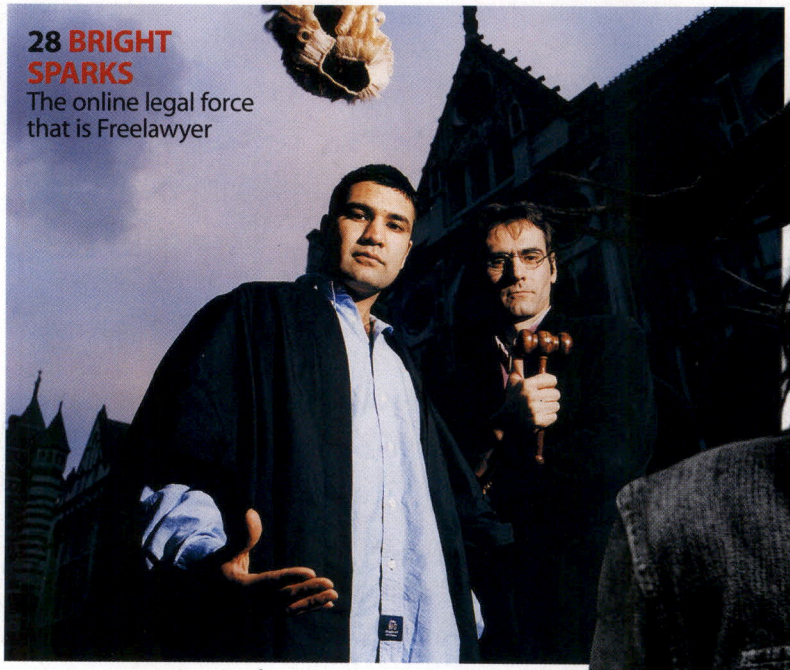

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The online legal force that is Freelawyer

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They told us the Internet boom was over, yet the start-ups keep on coming. Is it still possible to make a dot com fortune, and how do you do it? We asked Web winners and losers

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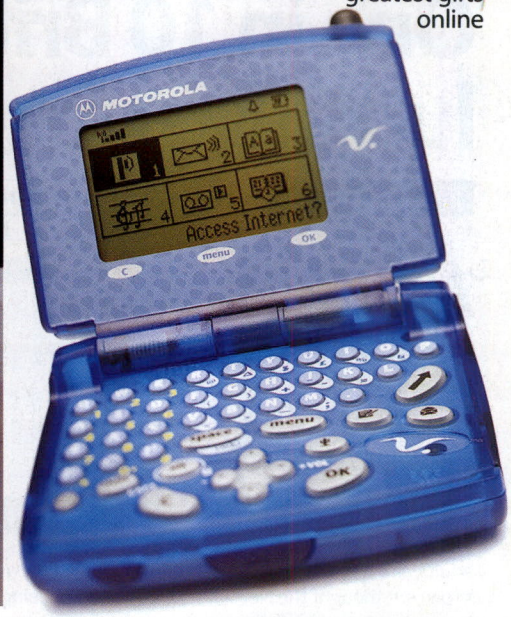

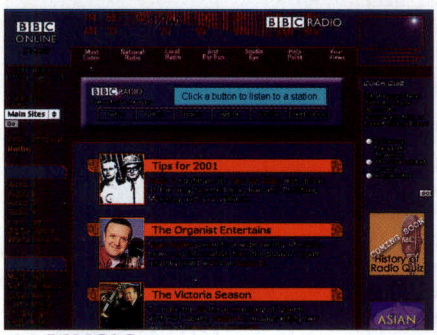

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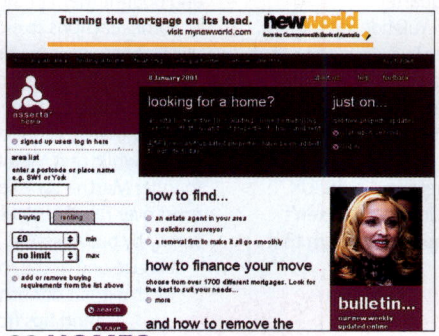

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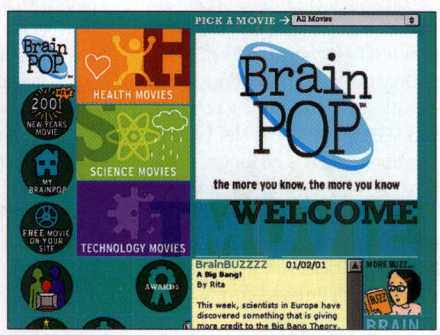

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Homework sites that merit top grades

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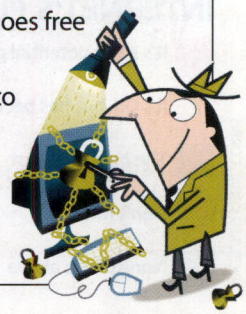


One in 10 Britons harbours lucrative dot com idea

EXCLUSIVE **Over half of us see a bright online future, our survey finds**

An astonishing one in ten people in the UK has a dot com idea they think could make big money, new research conducted exclusively for *the net* has revealed.

The finding flies in the face of recent press reports suggesting the Net boom is over, with almost 15 percent of Net users seeing themselves as potential e-millionaires. The survey, which spoke to 1,000 UK adults, also found an incredible 51 percent thought the Net 'will become an increasingly important part of everyday life, and remains a potentially lucrative market'.

Only five percent of those questioned in the survey, conducted by RSGB, thought 'the Net bubble has burst and it is no longer possible to make money out of it'.

The positive feelings about the dot com world were shared by staff at online retailer Amazon this Christmas. It enjoyed strong growth, and posted sales figures of $960m (£640m) for the final quarter, just falling short of being the first $1bn dollar dot com in a quarter.

eToys: Euro operation shut in January

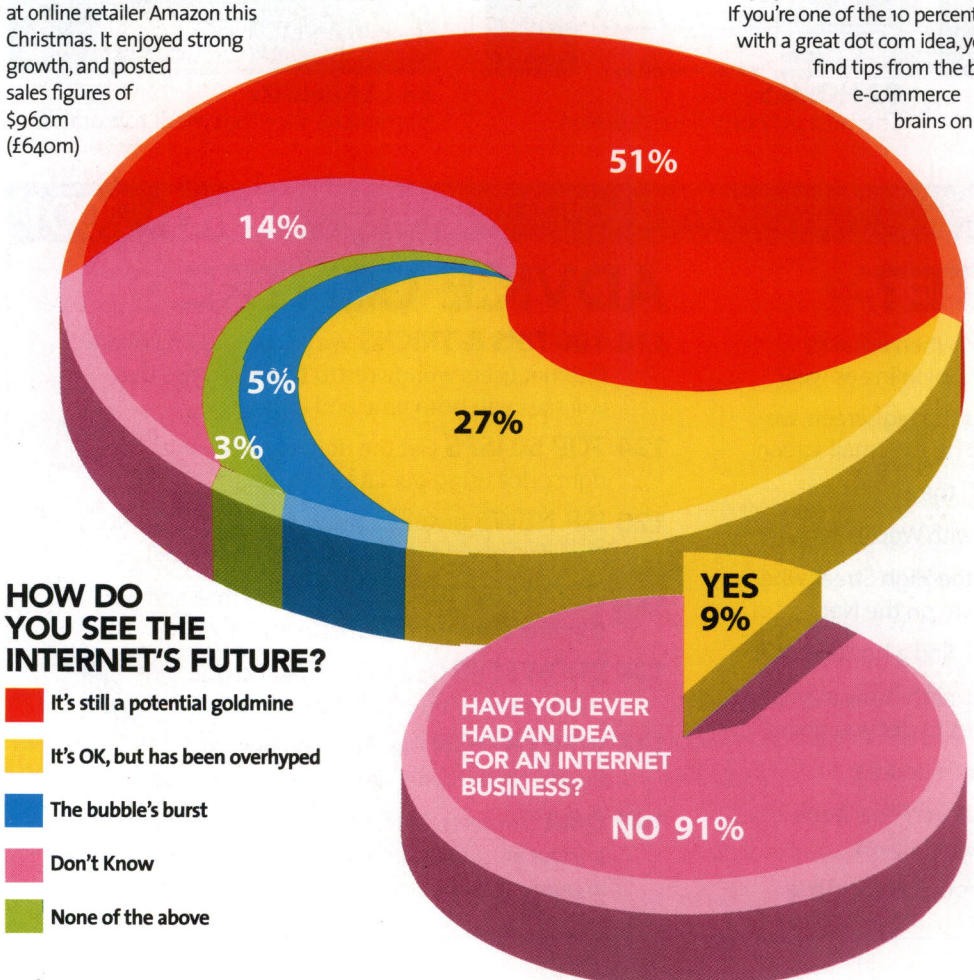
It wasn't all Yuletide joy, though, as toy retailer eToys decided to shut its European operations in January. The closure came despite the fact the site drew 21 million shoppers in America over Christmas and came top of all toy retailers in the UK.

Conditions in the UK weren't ideal for a shopping medium that depends on smooth deliveries. Mail deliveries in the south-west of England were threatened with disruption after postal workers voted to take strike action.

And on top of that there were continued problems with rail links following the Hatfield disaster and widespread flooding. However, a study by business analyst firm Just-sites.com found that 25 percent of workers with Internet access used their computers to browse for presents, even if they then went out and bought them in the high street.

Some reactions to e-commerce will be harder to overcome, though. Research International found that German shoppers prefer to be invoiced than give out credit card details, while Last Minute.com co-founder Martha Lane Fox was voted most over-rated businessperson in a survey by business365.

If you're one of the 10 percent with a great dot com idea, you'll find tips from the best e-commerce brains on p34.



PICTURES: KOBAL, CORBIS

Net alarm busts jams

Commuters looking to get that extra half hour in bed will be relieved to hear about a mobile phone alarm that wakes you up earlier or later, depending on how bad the traffic is.

The phone, which is being developed by BT, will warn travellers if the traffic is bad so they can get up earlier, or let them sleep on if the roads are relatively clear. It downloads the information about a route from the Internet and works out how long the journey will take.

It also creates a text message with instructions for the best route to work. No more excuses, then...

Jam-busting BT mobile will wake dead

Cybercops use Web to recover art fortune

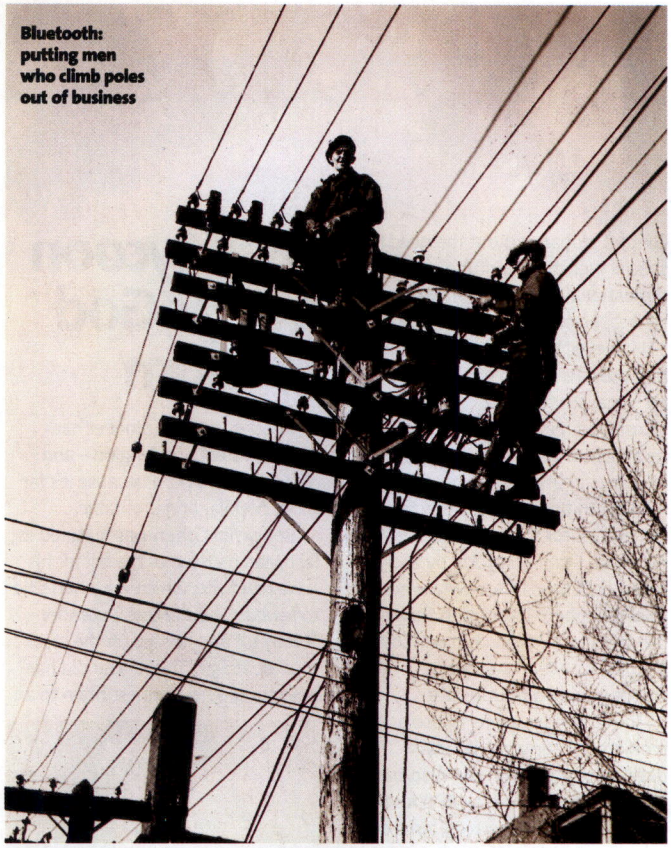
A crack cybersquad within the Italian police has proclaimed 2000 as 'the year of the Internet' after using the Web to track down thousands of stolen works of art.

In its first year of hunting for missing artefacts over the Internet, the unit recovered more than half the 26,000 works reported stolen.

Carabinieri commander General Roberto Conforti said detectives had been able to infiltrate the art black market by exploring sites offering items for sale.

Many of the artefacts listed as stolen had been taken from archeological digs in Italy, but the search also revealed two 17th century marble busts of Saints Paul and Peter, which had been stolen from a church in Rome.

If you can read Italian, you can check out the Carabinieri's extensive lists of stolen and recovered art at their site: ***www.beniculturali.it/cctpa/immagini.html***.



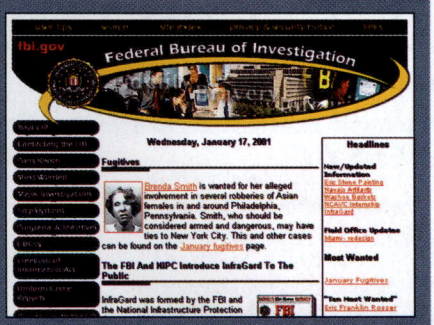
Bluetooth: putting men who climb poles out of business

KNOWHOW THE INSTANT EXPERT GUIDE

No.20: Bluetooth

I was wondering when we'd return to those golden days of roaming the seas, searching for buried treasure...
I think you're confusing it with Bluebeard. Bluetooth is a new wireless technology that will free up all those appliances that usually have to be plugged into a computer.
What's so great about it?
Usually, devices like cameras or printers need to load software called drivers onto a computer, to tell it what they can do. Bluetooth devices will communicate these facts to each other with radio waves as soon as they are within 10 metres of one another. The key word here is interoperability.
How will it change my life?
Bluetooth enthusiasts claim it will change things forever. Your Bluetooth fridge will tell your PDA to remind you to buy food, your Bluetooth TV will turn itself down when the Bluetooth phone rings, and all without you tripping over a mountain of cables.
Who invented it?
It was developed by an alliance of different companies, including IBM, Intel, Microsoft, Nokia, Motorola, Ericsson, Toshiba, 3Com and Lucent.
When can I start installing it?
The first few products are only just coming to market, so they are still rather expensive. Also, the standard is in its early stages; it's probably wise to wait until it's matured for a while and all the bugs have been worked out.

New Year's Eve crash averted



A teenage hacker gang's plan to bring down the Net on New Year's Eve by unleashing a killer virus was foiled by FBI agents, it has emerged. The US agency has seized computer equipment, but has not yet made any arrests. However, four Israeli youths linked to the sabotage attempt were arrested by police in their country. Chat room provider Dalnet tipped off the FBI last October, when a 16-year-old claimed the attack would bring down the Internet. However, the teenager has denied any wrongdoing and says he was merely bragging to extend his reputation online.

NEWS IN BRIEF

FIRST BYTES>>

> GOVERNMENT OKAYS PC PLOD

Labour is working on a system to let the public report crimes using the Internet. Home Office Minister Charles Clarke said development of a portal for the reporting of minor crimes was underway: 'While many forces are already introducing services via their own Web sites, I believe the public should be able to interact with their local force through a standard interface.'
out by the political body claims schools are struggling to keep up with changing technology, even though 98 percent of secondary schools and 86 percent of primary schools are connected to the Web. Recent Whitehall statistics found that the ratio was 12.6 children to each computer in primary schools, and 7.9 in secondary schools. However, the report said it was 'highly likely' the Government will meet its target to connect all schools to the Internet by 2002. Look out for our pre-election review of the main parties' Internet policies in *the net* soon.

FourFourTwo: can you think of nothing but Saturday?

> DOT COM EXEC'S DREAM NO. PLATE

A vehicle number plate that dot com executives would die is up for sale. The 1NET plate is being sold off by its owner Annette Radley, who has identified a number of industries that might like it to add a personal touch to whatever they drive. 'There could not be a better registration for an Internet company. I will also be contacting certain football teams and fishermen,' said Radley. You can make an offer by calling her on 07979 691 753.

> LIB DEMS SLAM SCHOOL ACCESS

Internet access in Britain's schools is 'intermittent and far from ideal', according to the Liberal Democrat Party. Research carried

> BE A FOOTBALL BRAIN OF BRITAIN

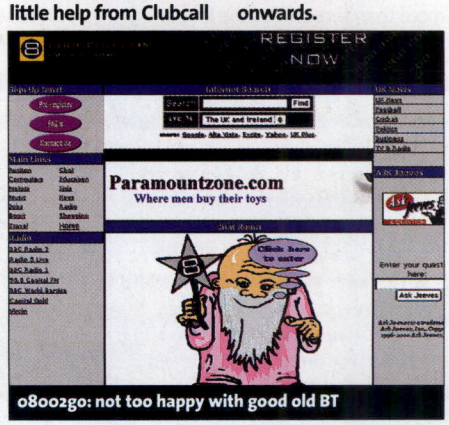
Football portal Four FourTwo has set up a Web quiz to find The Football Brain Of Britain 2001. With a little help from Clubcall and Umbro.com, *www.footballbrainofbritain.co.uk* will plumb the depths of visitors' knowledge in its nationwide search to find the undisputed football expert of the year.

> BT SUED BY LITTLE-KNOWN ISP

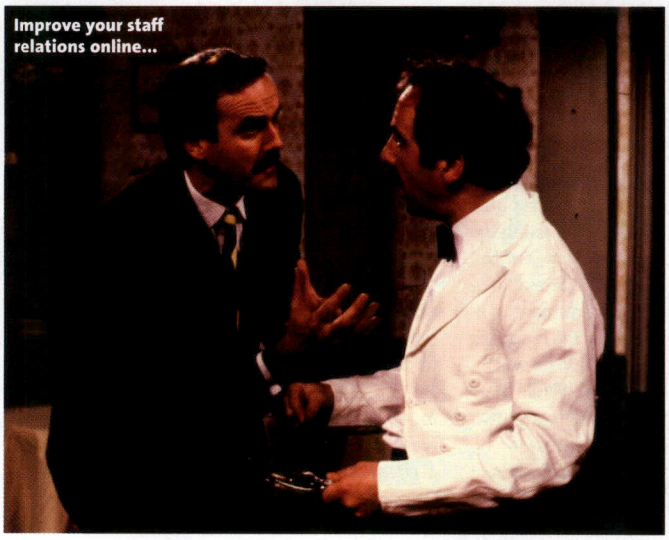
BT is being sued for breach of contract by a little-known ISP for allegedly failing to provide unmetered Net access. Zone Corporation, which runs 08002go.com, claims it had agreed a contract with BT, but the telecoms company pulled out of the deal. Dennis Cawley, MD of 08002go.co, said the deal with BT would have allowed his company to offer always-on Net access for £5.83 a month.

> GRAND THEFT AUTO 2 SET FREE

Freeloader.com has pulled off a coup by adding popular driving game Grand Theft Auto 2 to its range of free downloads. The game sees players attempt to increase their reputation among the ranks of organised crime. It will be available for download from 25 February 2001 onwards.



08002go: not too happy with good old BT


Improve your staff relations online...

Gain something in the translation

IBM gives businesses the gift of tongues

IBM is breaking the language barrier with the development of a tool that translates Web pages, online chat and email messages.

The WebSphere Translation Server translates texts to and from English, and includes support for French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Korean speakers.

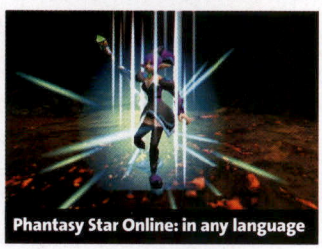
The software can translate up to an amazing 500 words per second and runs on Microsoft Windows NT, IBM AIX and Sun Solaris.

IBM plans to target the software at e-commerce businesses looking to extend their online transactions to other countries. The software will allow businesses to make their Web content global, without the need for special Web pages or funding for professional translators, a company spokesperson said.

However, the software could also find use as a customer service and technical support tool. Its speed of translation means engineers would be able to chat with users in other countries in their native tongues.

Industry analyst IDC projects that the market for software translation will reach $378m (£270m) by 2003. And its not hard to see why: when the WebSphere Translation Server hits the shops in March, it will cost $10,000 for every language a company wants to translate.

The language barrier is also a problem for gamers who play networked games on the Web, but Phantasy Star Online, an RPG for the Dreamcast (***www.sega.com***), aims to solve this problem. The online version uses a Word Select system to translate the game players' chat from English, French, Spanish, German, Japanese and Italian into any of the supported languages.


Phantasy Star Online: in any language

The Web: more popular than ever

UK Internet traffic continues to rise ever upward. The latest figures revealed by the London Internet Exchange (LINX), which handles more than 90 percent of the UK's Internet data flow, broke through the 5 gigabits-per-second barrier in the first week of the year. That's more than three times the level it was at for the beginning of 2000.

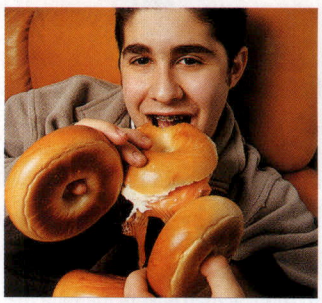
One gigabit is a thousand million bits of data, which roughly equates to 60,000 average email messages. So the equivalent of 300,000 emails per second pass through the exchange, but with such a volume of traffic, worrying virus problems are also on the increase.

UK-based email filtering company MessageLabs – which acted quickly to protect its customers from the Love Bug 10 hours before an official fix was publicly available – has reported that an email virus was detected once every three minutes during 2000. During October alone there were more than 30,000 viruses detected – meaning almost one in 700 emails carried a virus.

Teen tycoon swaps God for porn

A teenage dot com pioneer has turned his back on religion – and moved over to porn because it's far more popular and profitable.

Benjamin Cohen was featured in last March's issue of *the net* for his JewishNet site, which was then sold to *London Jewish News* publisher Totally plc and floated on the stock market at £5m. The 18-year old has now turned his business brain to an



altogether different market.

Cohen plans to launch his new service on St Valentine's Day with the aid of a rabbi and a naked model.

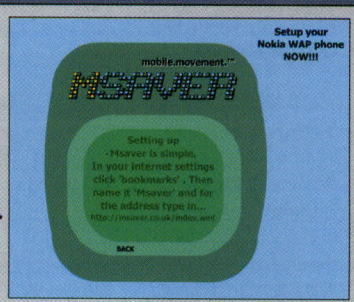
'I've been doing porn longer than I've been doing JewishNet,' says Cohen. 'Then I got religious, then went back to doing porn again.'

Cohen, who's just finished his A-levels, retains a keen business sense. 'I'm always surprised at how popular porn is,' he says. 'The only sites which make a profit are porn sites; there is a lot of money to be made out of this. There is a demand and we satisfy it.'

Cohen's parents are aware of their son's new business direction, but as of yet he doesn't have a girlfriend to disapprove of his activities: 'When it comes to girls my own age, I can't seem to find anyone I like,' says the teen tycoon.

WAP SHORTS» SET UP YOUR MOBILE FOR WIRELESS

SUPER SAVER
Proof positive that WAP grows ever more like the Internet arrives in the form of the first WAP screensavers. Msaver (*www.msaver.co.uk*) is a free service which animates GIF files into mini-screensavers. You can even send in your own GIFs for uploading. Msaver was set up by 16-year-old Chris Mole, who claims the service is the first of its kind in the world.



LINK ABOUT IT
The best ideas are so obvious it's a surprise no one thought of them before. Such is the case with Virgin Mobile's new integrated SMS and WAP service. Users sign up for news on subjects from film to football and receive SIM updates which include a hyperlink-style WAP connection to a film review, full match report, etc. Thankfully, Virgin promises it won't let firms spam phone owners with SMS advertisements.

PHONE A FRIEND?
Finnish developer Codeonline is preparing to adapt *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* to the wireless Web with SMS and WAP versions of the hugely popular programme. It's not known whether players will be able to phone a friend while playing.

PICTURES: BBC

Hacked-off poet targets Boots

An unusually lyrical hacker has attacked Boots the Chemist's Web site – and left behind a poem. Britain's biggest chemist had its corporate site (***www.boots-plc.co.uk***) hijacked by someone who left behind the 534-word poem known as the 'Hackers' Manifesto', partially reprinted below.

The site was hacked by exploiting flaws in Microsoft's Web server software, for which patches are available. Boots said the site was quickly repaired and contained no sensitive data.

If the poem – which has appeared elsewhere on the Net before – reads like bad third-form poetry, that's probably because it is. Making reference to struggling to come to terms with reducing fractions, the piece attempts to explain hackers' frustration with conventional schooling and consequent escape into illegal electronic subversion. Or something. The whole poem can be found at ***www.attrition.org/mirror/attrition/2001/01/09/www.boots-plc.co.uk***.

THE CONSCIENCE OF A HACKER *(abridged)*
Did you, in your three-piece psychology and 1950s technobrain, ever take a look behind the eyes of the hacker?/Did you ever wonder what made him tick, what forces shaped him, what may have molded him?/I am a hacker, enter my world.../I'm smarter than most of the other kids, this crap they teach us bores me.../I made a discovery today. I found a computer. Wait a second, this is cool.../Rushing through a phone line like heroin through an addict's veins...This is our world now...

PLUG IN, SIT BACK AND SURF WITH LA-Z-BOY

Microsoft and chair maker La-Z-Boy have teamed up to design the dream seat for mouse potatoes.

The Explorer recliner comes with a built-in Sony wireless keyboard, Microsoft Web-TV receiver and sockets for dial-up or ISDN connections.

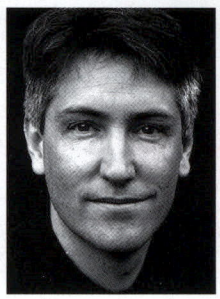
The chair's right arm features a drink holder and space for remote controls, magazines, etc.

In the US, the chair includes two months' free connection to the WebTV Plus service. Further access costs a flat monthly fee.

Shameless luxury like this doesn't come cheap, though: the Explorer recliner costs $1,049 (£710) for the fabric version, or $1,299 (£870) with leather or vinyl covers. Price and distribution details for the UK will be announced in March.

Jon Casimir

OPINION **DOT COMS ON THE EDGE OF DISASTER**



Own goals. Tragic dives. Queer pitches. Desperate attempts to win at all costs. Curiously undertalented players making millions by switching from outfit to outfit. Ah, who needs football when you've got all the drama of dot coms going under?

God, how I love watching them drown. Perhaps I shouldn't, but every time another of these overcapitalised, self-important, hairbrained companies breathes its last, I feel a little jolt, a frisson of good cheer.

I only wish some forward-thinking media company would realise the potential here for entertainment. Maybe Uncle Rupert – particularly now that he's shut down News Corp's online arm – could give us a cable channel dedicated entirely to dot coms on the edge of disaster. You know, anguished faces at the stock exchange, real-time reactions of the staff as they read the electronic memo instructing them to remove all Dilbert cartoons on their way out. Those little desktop webcams pulling in for the killer close-ups.

Oops, I'm gloating, aren't I? Well, yes, and why not? It may not be pretty, but schadenfreude is fun. If it wasn't, ***www.fuckedcompany.com***, a site famously dedicated to tracking every last soap molecule in the bursting Internet bubble, would not have 50,000 people on its mailing list.

Anything jammed into the spokes of e-commerce is more than likely to be okay with me

Why have I enjoyed seeing so many fragile, innocent dreams crushed under the unflinching weight of reality? Well, it's not because not one of these start-ups ever offered me a ludicrous salary, stock options, my own Coke machine and a dial-in account from the local pizza joint to bring my tenuous skill set and undeniable fashion élan to their rooftop parties.

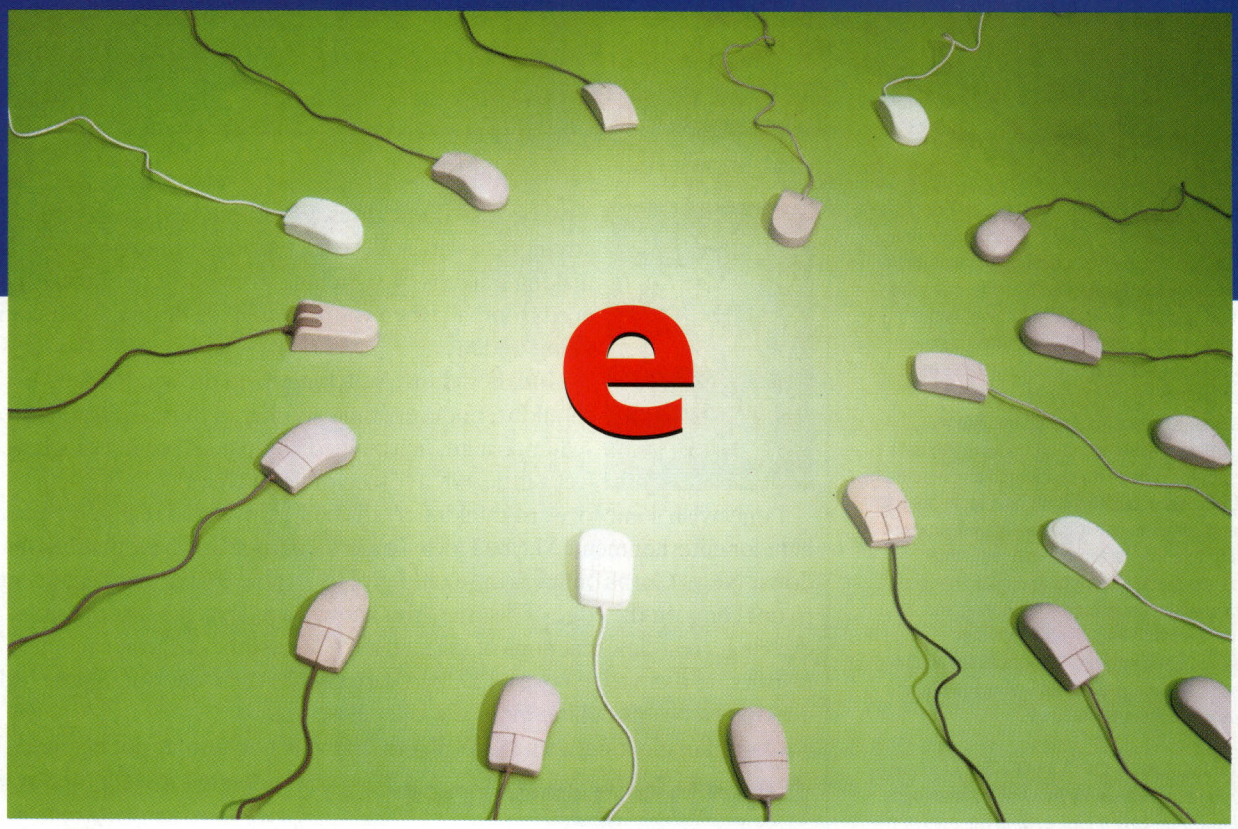
And it's not because I've never had an idea dopey enough to swindle a venture capitalist out of £20 million. I have those every day. I sneezed half a dozen out at breakfast. I think a couple of them may still be on the benchtop if you want them.

The rationalisation, the correction (and it is a correction) of the Internet industry brings a smile to my face for the simple reason that anything jammed into the spokes of e-commerce is more than likely to be okay by me.

Despite the media beat-ups about porn and paedophiles, the main problem with the Net is that the crappy gold rush mentality of the last few years has done a great job of obscuring what was good about the online world in the first place.

Think about it. Is the Internet really just a shopping mall? Or is it something much more complex, more profound? How many of these big-cheese dot com sites will you miss? I can't think of a single closure that has had an effect on my Net life. Can you?

Everybody's Doing It.



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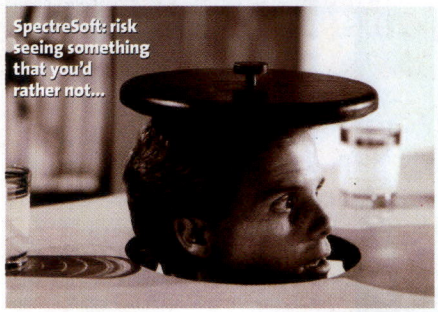

SpectreSoft: risk seeing something that you'd rather not...

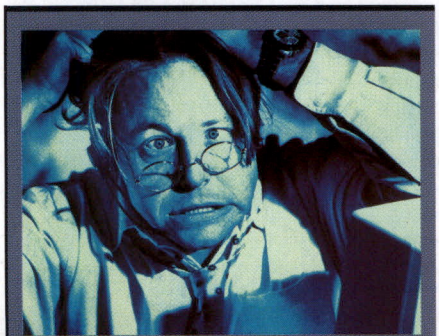
Spouses snap up spy software

A company which sells spy software for businesses to keep track of what workers are up to has found itself shifting copies to distrustful spouses.

SpectorSoft said that although it had initially aimed its eponymously-named product at either companies or parents concerned at children's browsing habits, more than half its business was now generated by suspicious spouses.

And a poll of 100 people conducted by *the net* found 63 percent of respondents would use a spy program to see which sites their spouse had been visiting and what they had been writing in emails. Only one third of those questioned said they would not invade their partner's privacy.

SpectorSoft president Doug Fowler said the most chilling story he had heard was from a user who bought the software to see if his wife was having an affair, only to find she and her boyfriend were planning to kill him.



First it was road rage... now it's search rage

A recent survey claims to have uncovered a new frustration in our ever-busier lives: Web rage. Adding to road rage, air rage and train rage in the plethora of things that irk us, Web rage is brought on by insufficient or inaccurate returns when using search engines, according to a survey sponsored by new 'specialist search engine' Web Top (*www.webtop.com*).

The report claims 86 percent of users feel Web searching could be more efficient, while 71 percent are driven to frustration. Apparently the average length of time before anger sets in is 12 minutes. And more than a third (36 percent) of Net users claim to spend more than two hours each week looking for information.

PICTURES: KOBAL, CORBIS

Tim Richardson

OPINION CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY

There used to be a time when people didn't trust email. They'd drop you a line, press the 'send' button and then phone you half an hour later to see if it had arrived. It's as if people simply weren't confident about the technology.

It's a wonder anything ever got done. It seemed the whole day was spent sending email and then following it up with a needless phone call. And if you weren't phoning someone, someone was sure to be phoning you.

It still happens now, to a certain extent, with people new to the Net often checking to see if their email has arrived. You see, it's all a question of trust. Some find it harder than others to accept you can tap away at your keyboard, click a button, and bingo – your words and thoughts are shared with someone else, quite possibly on the other side of the world.

Who would blame Claire Swire if she never sent another email in her life?

Once they get into the swing of things it doesn't take long before they begin to relax a little and believe in the technology. And after a while, it becomes second nature – impossible to imagine how you ever survived without it.

But what happens when that trust is broken? What happens when email bites back? In a way, that's what happened to Claire Swire, who's been impossible for newspaper readers to avoid recently – except it wasn't the technology letting her down, it was the people she was sharing it with.

She sent a personal email to her lover – meant for his eyes only – which was forwarded to work colleagues by her rogue boyfriend. The content was salacious enough that those who received it – particularly, it must be said, men – felt the need to share it with others. Within days millions had read the lewd mail.

What was meant to be a personal and private exchange between Claire and her lawyer boyfriend, Bradley Chait, sparked a frenzy of media interest. The result of his inability to keep a conversation private was that a number of people were suspended from their jobs. Others, including Mr Chait, were disciplined formally by their employers but escaped dismissal.

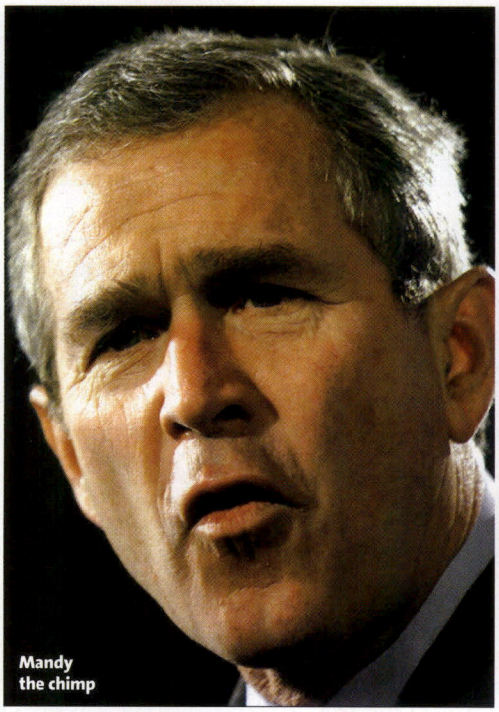
And then there's Claire, whose pictures and personal details were plastered across a number of tabloids. What did she go through? In fact, who would blame her if she never wanted to send another email again in her life?

Some have argued the whole incident was blown up out of all proportion, others that those involved brought it on themselves. Maybe. Maybe not. But it does make you think. No matter how far advanced the technology we rely on, it's only as secure and as safe as the person using it (or the person on the other end of it). The impersonality of wired communication shouldn't lull us into thinking we don't need to be as careful in our emails as we do in our real-world speech.

So here's the moral. Next time you send someone an email, ask yourself one thing: 'Do you trust them?' Well, do you?

thenetnow»

://Heroes & Zeros – the best and the worst of the Web



Mandy the chimp

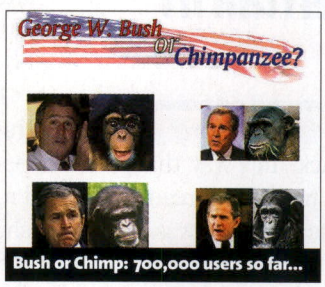
The President of the United States

HERO FUNNIEST WEB IDEA

'Dubya' in simian shock

WITH ALL THE FUSS AND POLITICAL hair-pulling over who was going to be voted US president, the winner was never going to have an easy time of it. But George 'Dubya' Bush can never have imagined one of the outcomes would be a site dedicated to whether or not he is a chimp.

The site's owner claims he's not acting from political motives and that he has nothing in particular against the man: 'I just think he kind of looks like a chimpanzee.' Nevertheless, what follows on



Bush or Chimp: 700,000 users so far...

www.bushorchimp.com is a collection of photos of chimpanzees (he's very clear on this – no monkeys, orangutans, etc) and the recently-elected Leader Of The Free World sharing uncannily similar expressions.

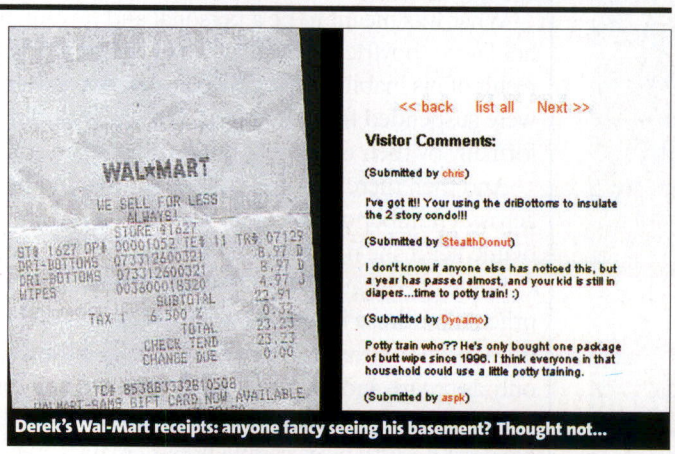
It's only a Web site though, so Bush can't be too annoyed by it, right? Wrong: some of the comparisons feature on T-shirts sold on the site. And since people have complained that it's cruel to compare chimps to Bush, all the proceeds will go to a chimpanzee preservation charity. How long before we're browsing ***blairorbaboon.com***?

ZERO SCARIEST WEB SITE

Going to the Wal-Mart

IT STARTS OMINOUSLY ENOUGH, with an intro worthy of Norman Bates chatting to his mum: 'It's been about three years now. For some odd reason, I don't throw away my shopping receipts – any of them. I keep them all in an old toaster box. No indexing, no purpose, no real reason to hold on to them. Until now.'

Yes, you've guessed it: this site (***lightning.prohosting.com/~receipts/index.shtml***) contains one man's receipts from Wal-Mart dating back to 1996, scanned and reproduced for your pleasure. Not shy to hear people's comments, Webmaster Derek has included a space at the side of each receipt for you to post your thoughts. And just when you thought it couldn't get any scarier, it does, with a thriving online discussion of our Del's purchases.



Derek's Wal-Mart receipts: anyone fancy seeing his basement? Thought not...

Dirty old man sells his soil

HERO CHEEKIEST STUNT

Where there's mud there's brass

AS OUR STUDY (p6) PROVES, PEOPLE still believe in the frontier spirit of the Internet and are convinced they can turn it to their economic advantage. One man who typifies this dream is Jonathan Fagan.

The 27-year-old solicitor from Leicester uses ***pileofmud.com*** to sell bags of soil from his garden. The products range from a £2.99 'Pauper Pack' containing 50g, to £12.99 for a 250g 'Executive Selection' bag. For especially large orders, Fagan videos the process of digging up the soil and includes a pamphlet detailing the fascinating history of mud.

If you need any more persuasion to go off and get your hands on some dirt, 10 percent of the annual profits are donated to charity, with this year's money going to a children's hospice in Leicester.

And make sure you don't leave without entering the competition, where you can win a bag of earth by naming the celebrity you think has slung the most mud recently.

HERO DEDICATED NUTTER

E-hermit comes out after a year inside

A MAN WHO WANTED TO PROVE to the world that he could survive for a year using the Internet by locking himself away in his house has finally ended his bizarre self-enforced confinement.

During the year, DotComGuy (who had changed his name by deed poll from Mitch Maddox) only left home to go out into his garden, and bought everything he needed for the whole year online. Surfers logged on to watch the e-hermit's daily life, which was broadcast by 20 cameras.

For one of his first actions in the outside word, the computer systems manager is planning to marry Crystalyn Anne Holubeck, whom he met in a chat room on his own site (***www.DotComGuy.com***). DotComGuy also plans to change his name back to his more mundane former moniker.

The year-long exercise was sponsored by companies which hoped to encourage shopping on the Internet.

PICTURES: NEWSMAKERS, CORBIS, BBC

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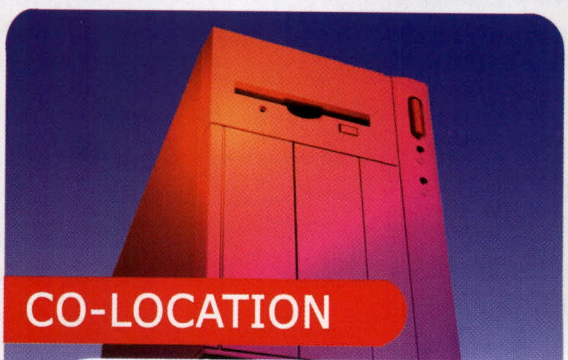

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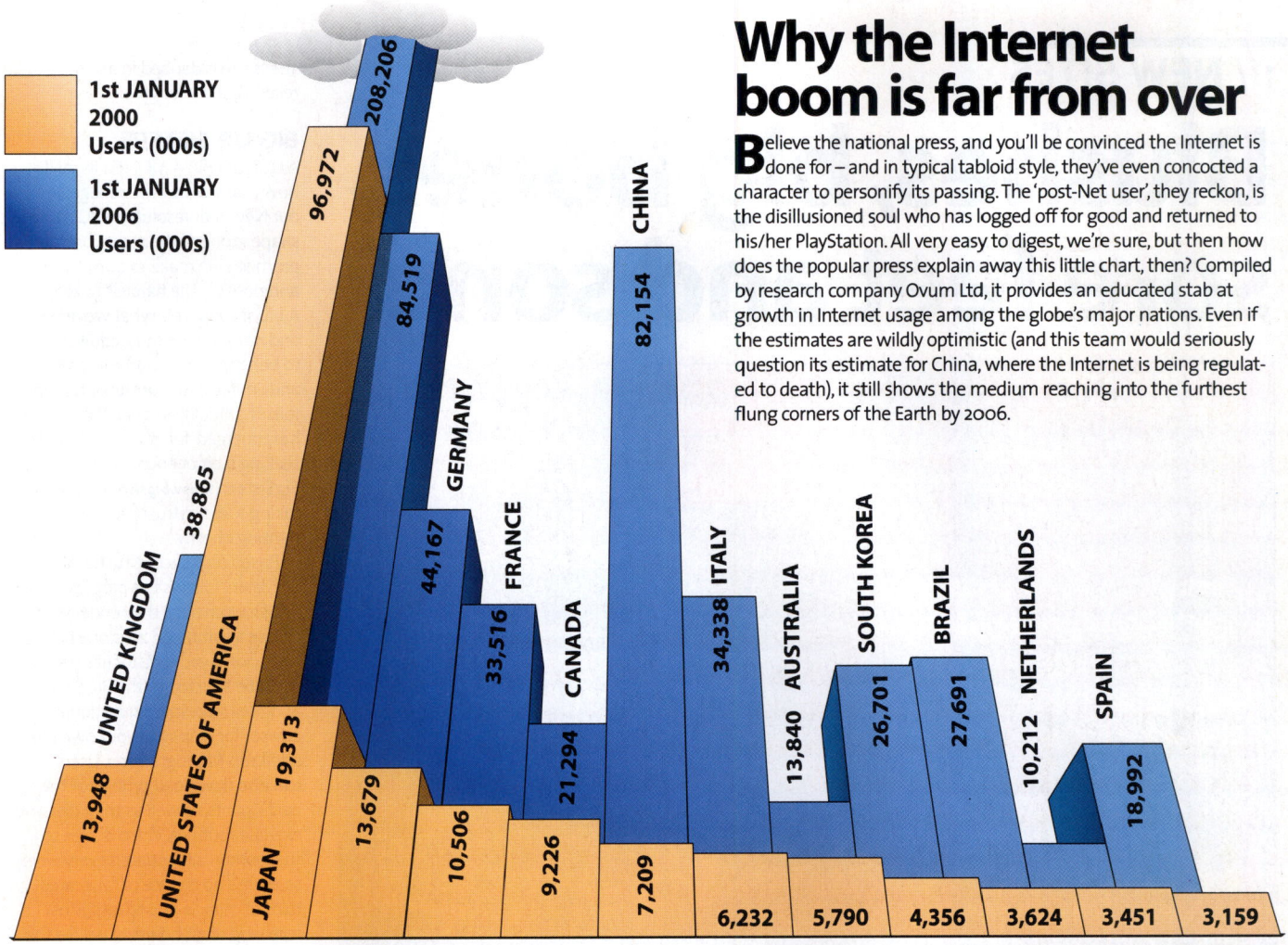
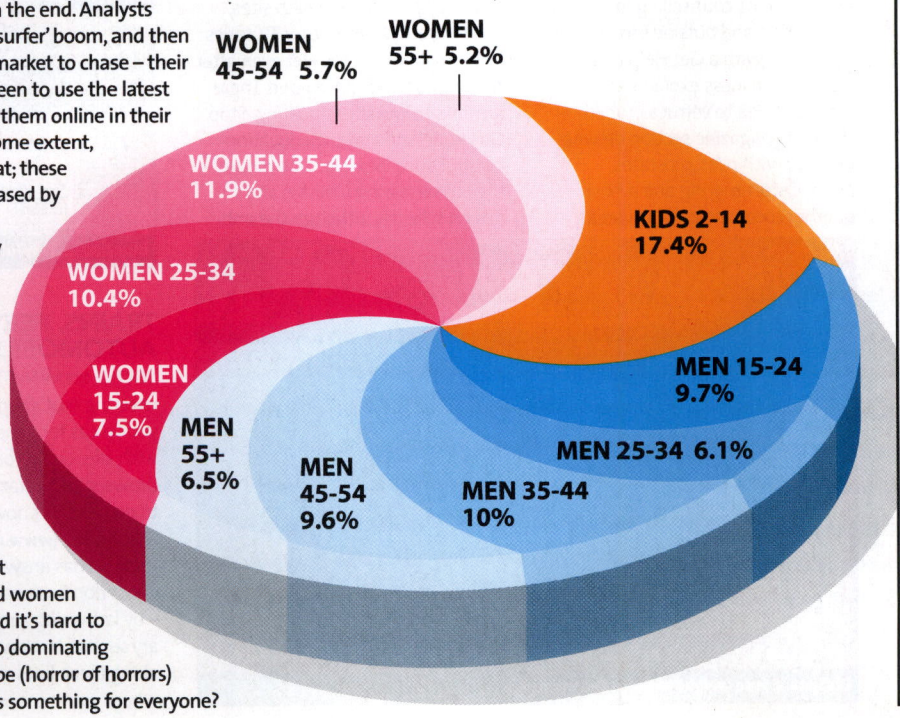


Why the Internet boom is far from over

Believe the national press, and you'll be convinced the Internet is done for – and in typical tabloid style, they've even concocted a character to personify its passing. The 'post-Net user', they reckon, is the disillusioned soul who has logged off for good and returned to his/her PlayStation. All very easy to digest, we're sure, but then how does the popular press explain away this little chart, then? Compiled by research company Ovum Ltd, it provides an educated stab at growth in Internet usage among the globe's major nations. Even if the estimates are wildly optimistic (and this team would seriously question its estimate for China, where the Internet is being regulated to death), it still shows the medium reaching into the furthest flung corners of the Earth by 2006.

The long and the short and the tall

The Internet was going to find its niche in the UK – everything does in the end. Analysts predicted a 'silver surfer' boom, and then saw teens as the market to chase – their anxiety at being seen to use the latest thing would drive them online in their millions. And to some extent, there's truth in that; these latest figures, released by global Internet research company Jupiter MMXI, reveal that nearly one in five UK youngsters aged under 14 have gone online. But what it exposes more than anything else is the sheer diversity in the use of the Internet – the split between men and women is pretty equal, and it's hard to see any age group dominating another. Could it be (horror of horrors) that it really holds something for everyone?



ILLUSTRATIONS: ALAN ELDRIDGE

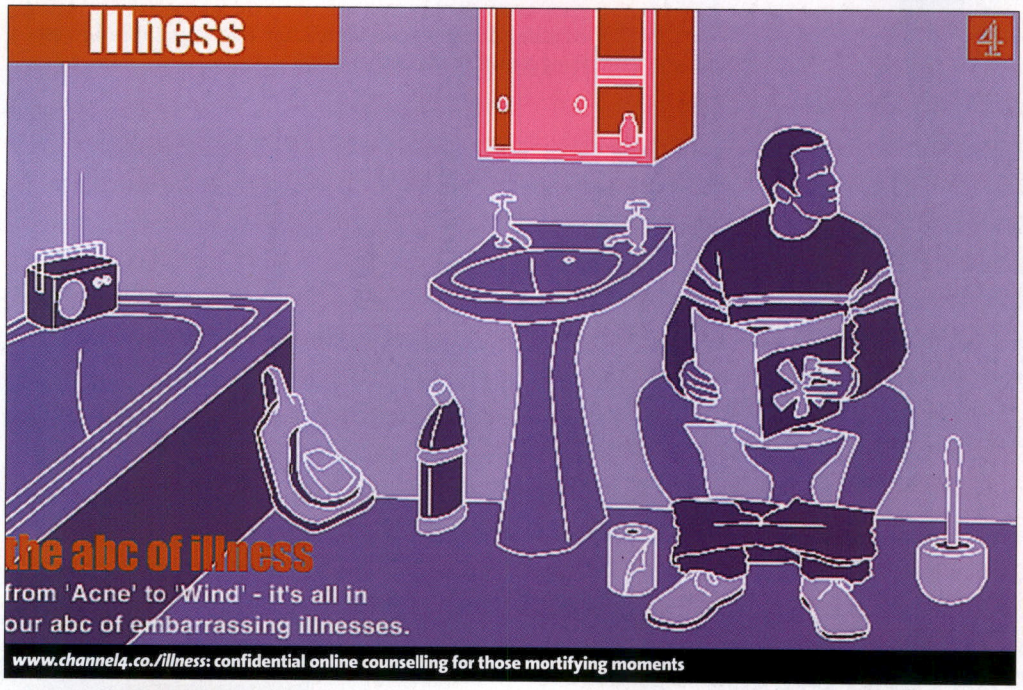
QUICK FIGURES

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT...»

- The capacity of the Internet backbone to carry information is doubling every 100 days
- **Voice traffic is growing at 10 percent per year or less, while data traffic is conservatively estimated to be growing at 125 percent per year, meaning that voice will be less than one percent of total traffic by 2007**
- In the last 24 hours, the Web has added 3,180,000 new pages, 59,700,000,000 new bytes of data, 716,000 new images and 11,900,000,000 new bytes of image data
- **Almost half of the UK's children have used the Net to search for something to buy, while 17 percent have actually made a purchase (source: NOP)**
- The Internet has over 91 million English-speaking users – compared with just 4.6 million speaking Chinese

:// NEW SITES

Blushes, big bones, sore feet and song



www.channel4.co./illness: confidential online counselling for those mortifying moments

REVIEWED

Channel 4: Illness
www.channel4.com/illness

Bigsisters
www.bigsisters.co.uk

Maporama
www.maporama.co.uk

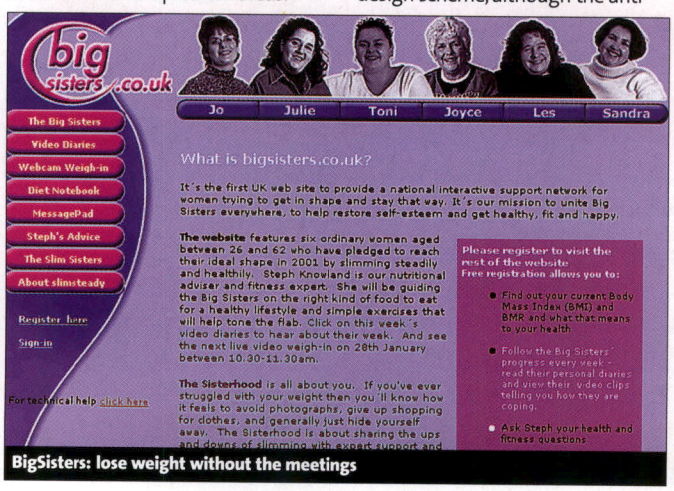
Wembley TV
www.wembleytv.com

RUDE HEALTH

AN OVERRIDING BENEFIT OF the Internet is its (relative) anonymity and confidentiality. And there are few times the user craves secrecy more than when he or she is suffering an embarrassing medical condition or complaint; garnering information from the worldwide library that is the Web can soothe many a pained mind (or indeed any other part of the body). As such, the subject of Channel 4's current TV series *Embarrassing Illnesses* lends itself perfectly to Internet usage.

Deploying C4's usual flair for design, the pop-up site at ***www.channel4.com/illness*** provides confidential online counselling in the Just Ask section and outside professional assistance with a Get Help directory. The ABC of Illness explains all, from amenorrhoea to verrucas, while there's a magazine section dealing in detail with piles, prostates, periods, stammering and a host of other common problem areas.

The site extends Channel 4's ever-developing range of health sites, established as support for TV series but remaining on the Net even after the programmes have gone. There are links to the stress-busting 'Stop, Go Home' site and the education-not-titillation 'Sex' site. Both share the Embarrassing Illnesses site's design scheme, although the anti-stress site is daubed in a very relaxing shade of green...



BigSisters: lose weight without the meetings

BIG UP, SISTERS

A LITTLE OVER A MONTH IN, AND how many of us have reneged on our New Year resolutions? Getting in shape is one of the most common promises we make to ourselves – and possibly the hardest to keep. A bit of support is what we need – and not the type that requires us to belt out 'Hi, my name's Felicity and I'm fat' to a roomful of hungry folk. Thankfully, an online alternative has emerged: for 'big-boned' ladies seeking a bit of encouragement: BigSisters (***www.bigsisters.co.uk***) is taking a less obtrusive approach to fighting obesity.

Based on a successful US site, BigSisters follows the progress of six British women as they endeavour to lose a combined 20 stone before July 2001. If you register (it's free), you'll be able to ask the Big Sisters and their appointed nutritional advisor for help with your own diet and keep-fit programme. Users can also download profiles of the participants, as well as their diet and exercise routines. Video diaries of the women are updated every week, so there's no chance of fabricated tales of miracle pound loss. Most revealing of all, however, will be the live Webcast weigh-ins, which will take place online once a month. Brave girls, this lot.

Maporama: helpful to non-drivers

TRAINS, FEET AND AUTOMOBILES

YOU'RE 20 MINUTES LATE FOR A meeting that's 15 miles away, and your pleas for a map are being met with silence. So you turn to your browser and... start wondering what to do next. But now the French site Maporama (***www.maporama.co.uk***) thinks it has answered the prayers of London businessmen everywhere – by launching a multi-modal itinerary service. Underwhelmed? Think along these lines: you tell the site where you are, where you want to

Phantasy Star Online: the world's first online console RPG

Net gaming no longer in the realm of Phantasy

go, and it tells you how to get there, either by car, train or on foot. More excited now? So were we. Or at least we were, until we tried it. For the purposes of objective evaluation, we compared it using three routes with Multimap (***ukz.multimap.com***). The good news is that the Maporama's itinerary works, and that its directions by 'subway' or on foot are easy to follow (Multimap only directs by car). But the directions *en voiture* are too vague (the distances in kilometres and metres are a pain if you have your car's trip set to miles) and the train coverage is limited to the London Underground. Still, someone travelling to the capital by anything other than car may find it of use.

Wembley TV: never miss a gig

LIVE AND CLICKING

THE RECENT MADONNA CONCERT at the Brixton Academy proved two things. Firstly, there's a great future for Webcasting live music. And secondly, the best concerts will be oversubscribed way beyond availability and thus sold out in seconds. What music on the Web therefore needs is a site catering to fans wanting Webcasts on a regular basis.

That's the premise behind Wembley TV (***www.wembleytv.com***). Powered by top gig promoters SJM and Metropolis (plus, of course, Wembley plc), WTV has been blazing a trail with a string of Webcasts from sold-out gigs. First up was Ocean Colour Scene, followed by David Gray, The Dum Dums, Feeder and Duran Duran.

In styling itself as a portal for live music, WTV lists the major artists currently touring the UK so you know just who you can pop out and see. You can buy tickets online and even submit gig reviews.

The gigs are Webcast in broadband, but if you're not yet up to that speed it's also streamed in 128k, 56k and even 28k. Sadly you have to pay for the digital-quality transmission, but you do get to watch the show as many times as you like over the following 24 hours.

REVIEWED

Phantasy Star Online
www.sonicteam.com/pso

Half-Life Imperial Mod
www.chaosrealm.com/imperial

Ultima Online: Third Dawn
www.uo.com/thirddawn

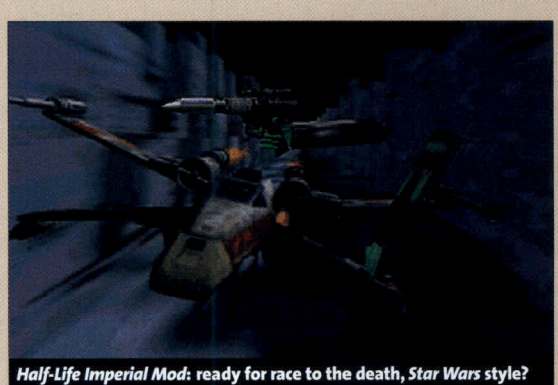
SEGA LEAVES SONY SILENCED

THIS IS DREAMCAST'S HOUR. AFTER MONTHS OF broken promises and postponed release dates, Sega finally got its act together at the end of 2000 and brought full online gaming into DreamArena. To everyone's surprise, it worked.

Since then, Sega has pressed home the advantage over its Netless console rivals. Games like *Quake 3* have had upwards of 100,000 players through DreamArena. *Phantasy Star Online*, launching this month, is the world's first online console RPG, introducing gamers to a world where you meet people and socialise as you play.

Speed Devils, *Pod 2*, *Worms World Party*: every new Dreamcast game is Netted in some way. Even the plodding, three-disc solo RPG *Shen Mue* shipped with a pointless fourth Internet disc which allowed gamers to meet and swap useless bonus items online.

Meanwhile, Sony has been watching Sega's opening fanfare in silence. As yet, there are no plans to bring Net connectivity to PS2 before autumn, although rumour has it that a UK firm has almost completed a non-Sony-endorsed modem. Goodness knows what they'll do with it, as Sony isn't likely to launch software until the release of its own broadband unit this autumn.



***Half-Life Imperial Mod*: ready for race to the death, *Star Wars* style?**

GET A HALF LIFE

IT MAY BE MORE THAN TWO YEARS OLD, BUT *HALF-LIFE* remains one of the Web's most popular games. And it's still attracting proto-serial killer types who program their own variations ('mods') on popular PC shooters. *Counter Strike* is the most famous of these, a grimly realistic frag-fest themed around counter-terrorist teamwork: it still gets thousands of players every day, and is available for free download from ***www.counter-strike.net***.

This month, though, all eyes are turned to ***www.chaosrealm.com/imperial***, where a dedicated band of artisans are working on a mod that allows you to play as teams of *Star Wars* characters in locations out of the movies. You play as Rebels versus Imperial forces, and each character has authentic special abilities: Boba Fett can fly and Battle Droids have night vision. Screenshots show it looking tasty already. *Chaosrealm* will have a working version up for free download in February. As with *Counter Strike*, you'll need a copy of *Half-Life* to play.

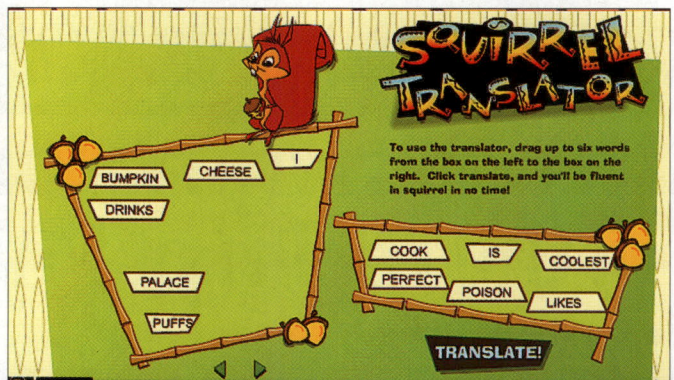
AND FINALLY... ELVES IN 3D!

THE BIG NEWS IN THE WORLD OF ELVES AND POINTY hats is the new version of *Ultima Online: Third Dawn*, which is, finally, in partial 3D. The code is at beta stage at the moment, although there's still no final release date. The new code not only tarts up all the characters and monsters with fair-to-middling 3D, but also adds an entire new continent, Ilshenar, to the Ultima world, which players will eventually be able to settle in and make their own. But long-time *Ultima* fans needn't fear: if you're still hacking and slaying through an ancient steam-powered Pentium, you'll be able to play the old 2D way.

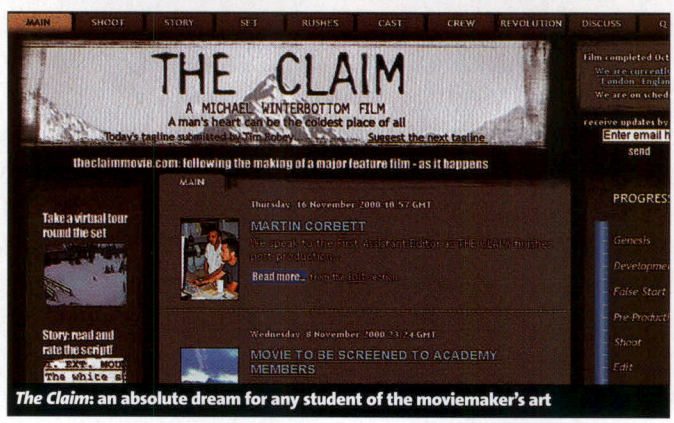
:// MOVIES

Gold, goblins and squirrel translation

REVIEWED
The Emperor's New Groove
disney.go.com/disneypictures/emperorsnewgroove
The Claim
www.theclaimmovie.com
Dungeons and Dragons
www.SeeDND.com



***The Emperor's New Groove*: complete with the truly sublime Squirrel Translator**



***The Claim*: an absolute dream for any student of the moviemaker's art**

DISNEY COOKS UP A GROOVY LLAMA

IF THERE'S ONE COMPANY THAT'S mastered the art of turning movies into top Web sites, it's Disney. The fact that the films are tuned for pre-teens and the resulting sites even more so is a bonus; both will keep them quietly employed for hours on end.

And they'll be busy when *The Emperor's New Groove* hits screens this month. The tale of a spoilt young emperor transformed into a Llama by an evil adversary (voiced by Eartha Kitt), Disney's latest buddy flick has the sort of sassy script that'll keep the grown-ups cackling.

Luckily, much the same can be said of the site (***disney.go.com/disneypictures/emperorsnewgroove***). While the non-Flash version won't set pulses racing (a basic plot outline sits alongside a QuickTime video of Sting performing the film's theme song), the Flash option is a peach. Aside from various desktop wallpapers and sound files to grab (both for PC and Mac), there's a bunch of unlikely recipes (cooked up by Kronk, the evil witch's henchman) and...the Squirrel Translator.

We won't delve into detail as to why this little masterpiece exists. Suffice to say you get to drag up to six pre-supplied words into a box. Hit translate and Kronk suddenly swings into view and talks complete and utter bloody nonsense at you. Well, we liked it, anyway.

IS THIS THE BEST FILM SITE EVER?

NOW TO MORE INTELLECTUALLY taxing matters. This month also sees the release of Michael Winterbottom's *The Claim*, an 'epic story of love in the chilly Californian Gold Rush' based on Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. All very highbrow stuff that's made a little more digestible if you use the director's three-word description of the film – 'a potato Western'.

What's this got to do with the Web? Go to ***www.theclaimmovie.com*** and you'll find one of the most imaginative and intelligent movie sites ever created. While most sites of the genre plough the usual furrow of desktop wallpapers and QuickTime trailers, *The Claim*'s is an extraordinary tour of moviemaking.

Try this: you get to read large chunks of the script and, once you've registered, 'score' it. You get to see 360-degree panoramic views of the various sets, all accessed via an interactive map of main locations.

It's also a startling study into how big movies are made. Every element of the moviemaker's art is exposed and discussed in immense detail, from pre-production to sound to the negative cut/score. The site's appeal will extend far further than just students of cinema; you're drawn in by the reality of the site, the fact that you're a party to something big in the making. The site had changed beyond recognition even in the few days between these words being written and going to press.

If this all sounds a little earnest, it is. That said, at least the site's makers (Resolve Media) have a sense of humour: the interactive poll on the home page sets this poser: 'A film is too long when it's: a) *Velvet Goldmine*, b) *Magnolia*, or c) Andy Warhol's *Empire State Building*.'

SERVES YOU RIGHT FOR GOBLIN BANDWIDTH...

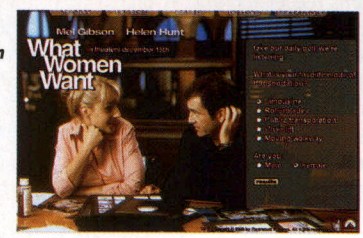
OK, THAT'S THE CEREBRAL STUFF dispensed with. This month sees an assault on the nation's screens by Goblin-infested sword and sorcery nonsense – in the guise of Dungeons And Dragons, starring Jeremy Irons and directed by *The Matrix* producer Joel Silver.

And, naturally enough, there's a Web version (***www.SeeDND.com***). You can smell trouble when, in place of 'Flash' or 'HTML' options, you're given 'Enchanted' and 'Humble'. The mire deepens when you realise that the 'Enchanted' (ie Flash) version involves a 2.6Mb download (six minutes through a 56.6K modem). And what do you get? Stills from the filming, a few desktop wallpapers and some artwork renderings of some of the movie's spectacular sets. Oh, and a series of pictures of various swords – including the fabulous Rod of Savrille (apparently handy for taming Red Dragons).

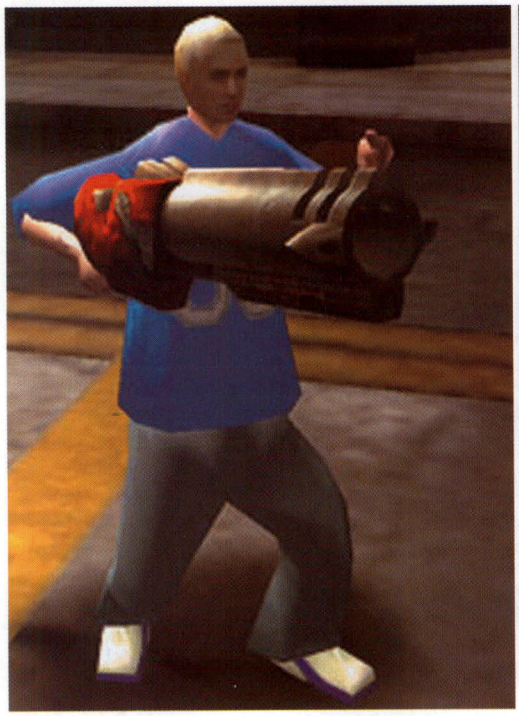
You get the same in the standard HTML version, only it doesn't move. Standard version it is, then.

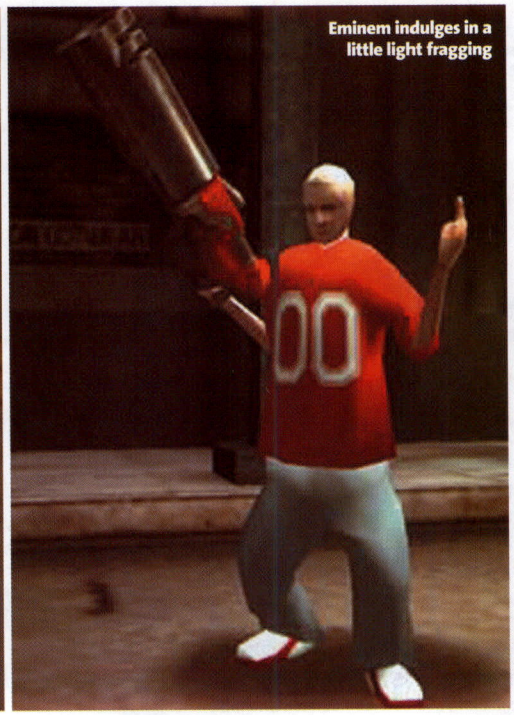
DOT COM DUFFER OF THE MONTH:

What Women Want
www.whatwomenwantmovie.com



We don't mind the odd online poll, but the sub-*Take A Break* survey supporting Mel Gibson's latest flick left us bilious. 'What do we most enjoy doing after sex?', we're asked. The options included 'cuddling' and 'eating a quart of ice cream'. No mention of ringing our partner to ask where they are. While the film's theme of Gibson's ability to hear women's thoughts lends itself to such Web surveys, need it be quite so dumbed down? Let's hope the film's a little sharper when it opens this month.





Eminem indulges in a little light fragging

:// MUSIC

Watch out – he's got a...oh my God!

WORDS: ROB WAUGH (GAMES); SAM UPTON (MUSIC); GARY PARKINSON, JENNIFER KEARNS, MARK PAYTON (NEW SITES, MOVIES)

REVIEWED

Eminem.com
www.eminem.com

Marilyn Manson
www.marilynmansononline.co.uk

George Harrison
www.allthingsmustpass.com

DIAL EM FOR MURDER

RIGHT NOW THERE'S NO ONE with a greater musical stock value than Eminem. With his impending court appearance, Grammy nominations and two gigs this month at London Arena (February 9 & 10), the man his mother calls Marshall Mathers (when she's not suing him) is definitely bad boy of the moment.

And Eminem's millions of fans are well catered-for by his official site, ***www.eminem.com***. Just like his mentor and producer Dr Dre, whose site ***www.dre2001.com*** is an abject lesson in what can be done with Shockwave and a little imagination, Em realises the importance of a strong online presence.

Besides the opportunity for users to choose their own background Eminem picture and 'beats', there's a downloadable Eminem browser plus video of his appearances on infamous US music show *Farmclub*. But best of all there's a downloadable Quake level where the foul-mouthed rapper and Dr Dre team up for some fine alien-blasting fun. Meanwhile, Mr Mathers also has his own online cartoon to be found at ***www.slimshadyworld.com***, a suitably distasteful weekly series of short animations with Eminem breaking just about every ethical code and taboo he can think of.

SEE MARILYN'S SNARLING MONKEY

WITH THE RELEASE OF MARILYN Manson's new single *Fight Song*, America's favourite anti-Christ is back in the thick of it once more. A roaring glam stomp of a record, it menacingly prowls around the verse until the chorus of 'Fight! Fight!' kicks in – complete with a rumoured video of an all-out school gym battle between goths and jocks.

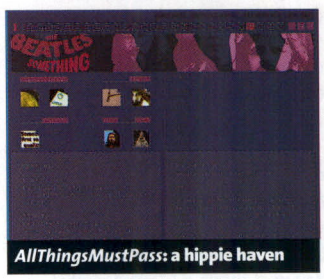
One look at his site ***www.marilyn-manson.net*** and, within seconds, it becomes clear this is no record company-produced promotional flannel. Greeted with animation of Manson thrusting a snarling monkey at the camera, the user is then transported into a bizarre gothic world of blackness. In the chat rooms, fans, family values crusaders and the plain curious meet to discuss topics ranging from whether MM is the most dangerous man on the planet to where he gets his hair done.

***www.marilynmansononline.co.uk*: it's really quite distasteful in places**

Recently, however, there's been more action on the UK version of his site, ***www.marilynmansononline.co.uk***. Having only been set up a few months, the Web pages have been holding much more allure for the Manson fan. A competition to win a trip to Hollywood by playing Manson's 'Valley Of Death' game was a recent highlight, while delights currently include a fairly horrific 'Disposable Teens' QuickTime movie and a load of suitably dark digital postcards. But as Marilyn himself asks, 'Is adult entertainment killing our children? Or is killing our children entertaining adults?"

KRISHNA LOGS ON

KRISHNA DEVOTEE GEORGE Harrison hasn't been having a great time of it lately, what with an insane stalker thinking he's an 'alien from hell' and trying to murder him. But the re-release of his first and finest solo album *All Things Must Pass* will probably cheer him up. Originally released in 1970, the first Beatles solo release after their split went straight to Number One, thanks to the success of single *My Sweet Lord*.



***AllThingsMustPass*: a hippie haven**

And continuing the Beatles' habit of setting up individual dedicated sites for each release (see also ***www.beatles.com*** for the release of recent compilation *1*), George has created ***www.allthingsmustpass.com***, a visual feast of hippie imagery and *Python*-esque animation.

Following the album's cover of George sitting in a field surrounded by garden gnomes, the site contains such treats as 'Cyril's Rare Guitar Shop', in which one click of a gnome brings up a psychedelic Stratocaster which treats the listener to some of Harrison's trademark slide guitar.

Then there's the download of a Harrison desktop in full hippie hair and beard regalia. This is one bizarre site worthy of anyone's attention. And the album itself? A bona fide classic, even if Phil Collins did play congas on *The Art Of Dying*.

MUSIC GARY PARKINSON

33 cents for MP3 gold dust

I RECEIVED A CHEQUE THROUGH the post this morning from a music Web site which hosted my resolutely unsigned band's songs. Not for a grand amount, you understand; in fact it was for 33 cents. That should pay for the Rolls-Royce I drove into the swimming pool the other night.

The risible amount had come from the Internet Underground Music Archive (IUMA), a Californian collective of unsigned bands who diligently divvy up income from ads. The more people that visit your page, the more ad money you get. This helps bands like ours hoping to sell a few CDs via the Net; to date, total income from our CD sales is zero (pounds, dollars or yen).

See, it's fine for Radiohead to wail 'Anyone Can Play Guitar'. The Oxford oracles played the Internet like a finely-tuned instrument to promote latest bestseller *Kid A*. But what if you're in one of the thousands of unsigned bands the general public couldn't care less about? Sites expressly dedicated to promoting unsigned acts seem like the groovy train to funkytown, but they vary wildly in their effectiveness.

Peoplesound (***www.peoplesound.com***), our first port of call in the bid for Net-propelled stardom, did the whole process in a manner more befitting mail order than the Net. You post off your CD and photos, which must first be approved by the site's admin, rather than emailing or uploading MP3s and picture files. And if anyone does like your music they have to wait for the same CD to pop through the letterbox, rather than paying to download your MP3s in the spirit of the new media.

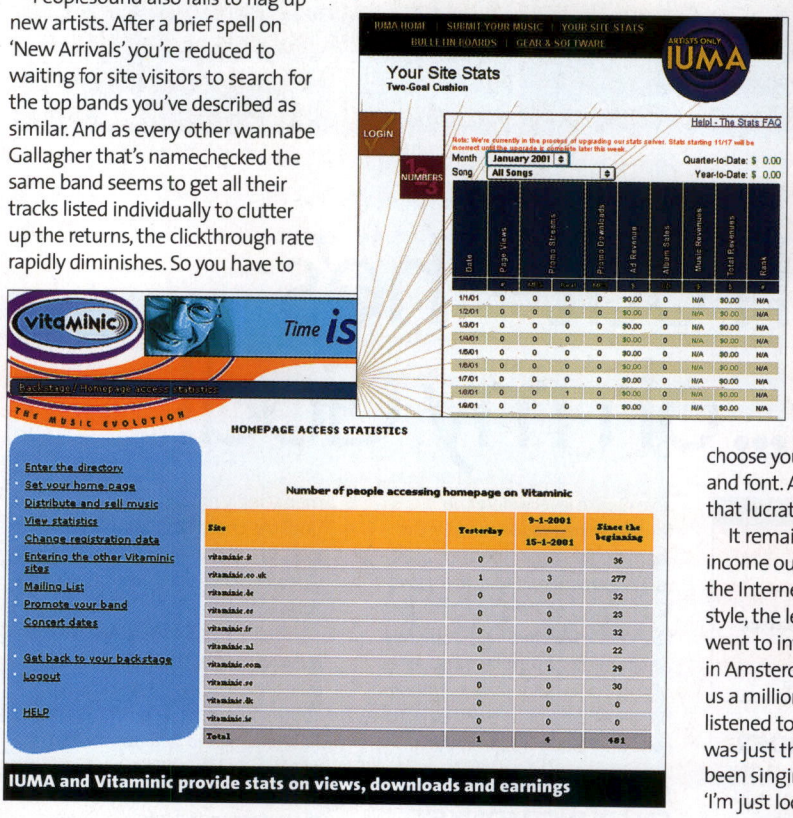
Peoplesound also fails to flag up new artists. After a brief spell on 'New Arrivals' you're reduced to waiting for site visitors to search for the top bands you've described as similar. And as every other wannabe Gallagher that's namechecked the same band seems to get all their tracks listed individually to clutter up the returns, the clickthrough rate rapidly diminishes. So you have to hope the A&R types at Peoplesound happen to listen to and plug your songs. Just like in the real A&R world, then...

Much more approachable for the DIY Colonel Parker is Vitaminic (***www.vitaminic.co.uk***). An online registration form, a password and you're off: an automated system allows you to upload pics and logos. But you're not alone: a real person is at the end of the email waiting to assist you if it all gets confusing. And you can check your site stats (page views, downloads and thus *earnings*) whenever you wish.

Vitaminic is also far more user-friendly for the MP3 fan. Again, music buffs can search for famous soundalikes (musos prefer to call them 'influences') and be pointed in the right direction, but towards bands rather than tracks – avoiding Peoplesound's repetition.

Truth be told, the IUMA site (***www.iuma.com***) is just about the best of the unsigned band sites. As with Vitaminic, the artist is in control from the off: you upload your songs, pictures and details in exactly the order you please. You can even choose your background pattern and font. And, of course, you get that lucrative ad money.

It remains the only source of income our band ever got through the Internet. In true rock and roll style, the lead singer went mad and went to investigate the herbiculture in Amsterdam. The Net didn't make us a million; we did get our songs listened to, the stats proved that; it was just that our listeners must've been singing the Stereophonics lyric 'I'm just looking, I'm not buying'...



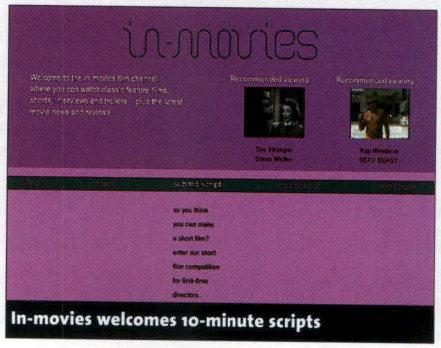
IUMA and Vitaminic provide stats on views, downloads and earnings

FILMMAKING JENNIFER KEARNS

They're gonna put me in the movies...

MY NEW YEAR RESOLUTION? TO QUIT RESTING on my laurels and finally sell a script. It's been niggling me for some time, and it's only since working with the Internet that I've realised it doesn't have to be a me-against-the-giants experience. Certain Web sites have been designed to encourage the deflated.

In-movies (***www.in-movies.co.uk***) has provided me with the biggest shove. Here's a site that wants 10-minute scripts from anyone who's got the drive to email them in. No more excuses about not having the time – or a stamp. And was it through osmosis that they decided to include segments from films that have, on plenty of occasions, left me muttering 'I know I can do that'? Or have they just realised the enormity of the hurdles that I, and others like me, have encountered and so wanted to provide proof that it could be done? Now I just have to build up the courage to hit that 'Send' button. I've got to do it though; if they like it, in-movies will get it into filmmakers' hands – and all the major festivals.



In-movies welcomes 10-minute scripts

Similarly, AtomFilms (***www.atomfilms.com***) has proved there's somewhere for the talented unknown to turn. Boasting a wonderfully diverse catalogue of short-form entertainment – documentaries, animation, fiction, you name it – they invite castaways like myself to submit finished works and, if it's to their liking, AtomFilms will take it from there. Suddenly those practical film and video courses don't seem like such wasted time. And, again, the shorts on display have provided me with the incentive to say 'they've taken the chance; why shouldn't I?'.

On a lesser but equally vital scale, the Cyber Film School (***www.cyberfilmschool.com***) has provided me with a refresher course in film. More importantly, it has links to discussion groups, where I'm thinking it may not be a terrible idea to discuss my hesitation with others in the same boat. Articles on everything from budget filmmaking to tips on creating a successful demo are there for me to read. It's all like someone saying that I've got no more excuses.

COOKERY
FAY WOLFTREE

There's plenty more fish in the Net

In a fit of enthusiasm, I bought a dozen scallops from the local fishmonger. But not having the first clue what to do with them, I log on to the Net and head for ***www.epicurious.com***, which lets you search over 11,000 gourmet sites by a variety of criteria. My initial search for scallops yields 167 results – too many for those in a hurry – and my 'enhanced' search (for a quick, French, main dish containing garlic, herbs and mushrooms) yields just one result, which doesn't appeal.

Next stop, ***www.cooking.com***, is a favourite for its advanced search which lets you exclude ingredients; very handy for those with food allergies or on special diets. Up come 34 recipes, complete with detailed nutritional breakdown and a facility to scale up quantities according to number of servings

required. My imagination just isn't being grabbed and time is pressing on, so I head for my old favourite, ***www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/search/shtml***. The search options are as lipsmacking as the hundreds of recipes, drawn from the BBC's plump menu of food shows plus postings from culinary-minded members of the surfing public. I can carry out my piscine probing by course, TV programme, chef (all the big Beeb foodies), key ingredients or how long it all takes.

I request scallop recipes taking a maximum of one hour to prepare and am struck by the inventiveness of Scallops with Blackberries (and wine), from Bo Simmons of Burrastow House Hotel. The recipe is easy to print out and to follow, and the results are magnificent. So who needs sticky, floury cookbooks cluttering up the kitchen, anyway?

Look what we've found!

SAINSBURY'S We find out what the staff at our local supermarket use the Internet for

DAVE ELLEMAN

DUTY MANAGER

I play guitar and look for midi sequencing programs. I'm also a Beatles fan and look for bootleg material available on the Web; there's a good list of sites at ***www.beatlesbeatlesbeatles.com***.

LAUREN MACINTOSH

PRODUCE

I look for mobile phone ring tones, from sites like ***www.boltblue.com*** or ***www.yourmobile.com***. I also use it for college work, and search ***askjeeves.com*** for maps to help me with my geography A level.

PAUL DENBY

TEAM SECURITY MANAGER

I look at fan sites for *Star Trek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and at sites to buy cheap DVDs. I also like looking at auctions sites, particularly eBay (***www.ebay.co.uk***), as you can pick up anything there.

DAVE BETHELL

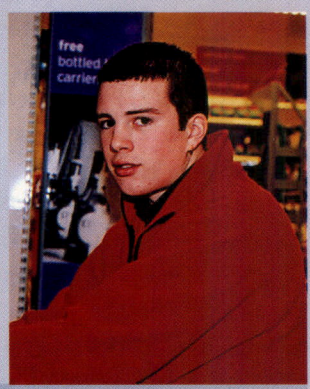
FISH AND MEAT COUNTER

I download a lot of shareware, like chatting on Excite (***www.excite.com***), and use the Internet to check my bank statement. I'm starting to build a web site about fishing.

SHIRLEY MULLINS,

STOCK CONTROLLER

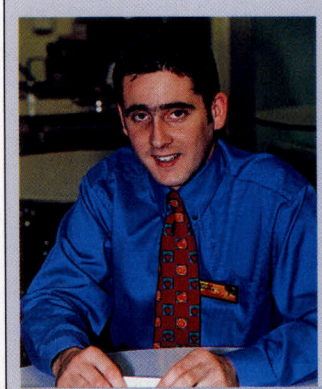
We do our banking online with the Woolwich (***www.woolwich.co.uk***). I wouldn't usually buy anything over the Net, but it's good for price quotes and we've booked a holiday online.



LEE HALES

BEERS, WINES AND SPIRITS

I mainly look for music sites. I'm into Limp Bizkit and Korn so I check their official sites (***www.korn.com***; ***www.limpbizkit.com***), but there are also some good fan sites.



STUART BROOKS

HOME SHOPPING MANAGER

My dad works in insurance and uses it to check financial sites. But I prefer to look for football news sites, search for details of concerts and visit music portals such as *Q* magazine (***www.qonline.co.uk***).

LAURA MARSHALL

SHELF STACKER

I mostly search for sites about music or club listings (***www.clubnation.co.uk***; ***www.timeout.com/london/hitlist/clubs.html***). I also use the Net to help me with my college work, mainly Spanish and English literature.

DAVID DOYLE

PRODUCE

I like looking at football hooligan Web sites because I'm interested in that. I also read the official West Ham Web site (***www.whufc.co.uk***), as well as fan sites about the club. And I like looking at music sites.

INTERVIEWS: MATTHEW CHAPMAN; PICTURES: RICHARD LAWRENCE

going, going, gone-on-line.

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DEAR SIR

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I have recently gone on the Internet through Telewest, and thought I had quite a good bargain when twice over the phone they informed me that their charge was 1p per minute at all times. So there was I, carefully going on and off line when I could to save call time. To my horror, when my bill came in it was far higher than I had thought it would be – not because I had gotten 'carried away' (how easy to do!) but because I had not realised their fixed connection charge of 3p applied to Net calls and was mounting up!! I did of course know about this charge for ordinary calls, and perhaps it was naive of me not to realise it would apply to all. Naughty (or deliberate?) of their customer service bods not to mention this – I did think of complaining, but thought it would not be worth it.

So I bought your magazine, which has a list of ISPs in the back, to see if I could find an alternative. Of course, any that have a connection number 0845 would incur this dratted connection charge so it seems I am trapped, unless I go onto a fixed monthly charge ISP (presumably 0800 without a call charge) which, for my low levels of use, would be a touch expensive. I realise that you cannot give any recommendations and any decisions have to be entirely mine, but for example – are AOL and BT Internet free of call charges? Then I spotted the advert for bigbluesky on p106 which – forgive me – seems a bit too good to be true. A friend warned me off these sort of firms as they have a tendency to go 'bust'.

This is all a bit new to me, but any guidance or advice you can give would be much appreciated.

David Howlett, via email

By the time you read this, BT should have launched its BTinternet Anytime service. This will offer Internet access with no call charges for £14.99 a month. AOL has a service with exactly the same features; £14.99 and no call charges. But coming in underneath these is Freeserve, with a flat rate package costing £12.99.

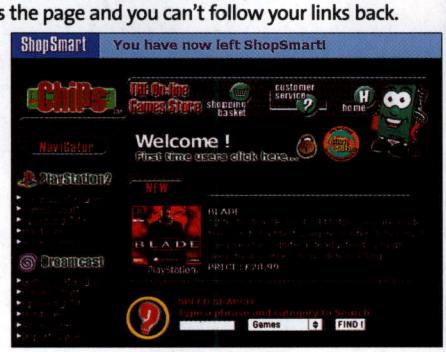
Unfortunately, if this type of fee is more than you are willing to pay because you only use the service occasionally, there's not much you can do. Your best bet is to use one of the free-access services and keep an eye on the clock to avoid racking up the phone bill.

PICTURE: PA

A reader rants

Unwanted site lock-ins

There is something I have noticed on an increasing number of Web sites that really gets on my nerves. When you have followed a link to a site – usually one that is desperately trying to sell you a product – using the back button to return to the previous site doesn't work; it merely reloads the page and you can't follow your links back.



I can understand it must seem enticing to a company, being able to take people hostage so they spend more time browsing their site, but this is the wrong way to go about it. If you want people to be locked into your site, try providing better content or services. An offspin of this is sites that keep you in their grasp when you have followed links on their pages. ShopSmart is a good example, where you are tracking a product on a company's Web site but you are still within ShopSmart's system.

Martha Cartwright, London

DEAR SIR

I have just been reading your February 2001 issue and was particularly interested in a news item featured on page 6, entitled 'It's Official: email can get you sacked'. You mentioned in that item that the Data Protection Commissions Code of Practice comes into force this spring, which will restrict any surveillance in the workspace.

I am having difficulty in finding out information about this and would be interested to know a lot more about it. The only reference material I can find is that relating to the Data Protection Act of 1998. I am sure loads of other people would be interested too, especially if it has implications that could affect employers and employees that use email.

Angela, via email

*The major technology news sites (such as **www.vnunet.com** or **www.zdnet.co.uk**) will keep you up to date on these issues and searching them for a relevant term will bring up all the recent coverage. There are also a number of organisations who look at this area, try Cyber Rights and Cyber Liberties (**www.cyber-rights.org**) as a good starting point.*

DEAR SIR

I have small problem, and I was wondering if you could help me. I want to build myself a computer, as this is part of my university course and have been using a search engine to try and find the cheapest computer hardware and software. I'm having trouble locating sites, and was wondering if you could recommend any useful places.

Sarah Davis, via email

*Computer Exchange's Web site (**www.cex.co.uk**) is worth a look – it has some excellent bargains that have been traded in by other PC and Mac owners. Failing that, visit a price-comparison site like **www.shopsmart.com** to save you shopping around for quotes.*

DEAR SIR

Just wanted to write and say, I do love your magazine. Its approach to the Internet is different from the magazines here in America.

I am a director in charge of my own company, Prelude2Cinema, which makes digital movies. I was hoping to gain more info about how to make a Web site more attractive.

Keep up the good work and I look forward to next month's issue.

Alex P Michaels, OH, USA
www.prelude2cinema.com

We have added a new column to our Step-by-step section (p136), specifically to look at the issues of Web design and Web site creation. Check back to this column in the future for tips on style and getting yourself noticed on search engines.

DEAR SIR

The date on your home page is displayed as: Thursday 4 January which is your date there but the time displaying is my local time which is around 7:40pm. And, because of the time difference, here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA it is Wednesday January 3. No big deal but I just thought you might like to know.

Lee Schwan, PA, USA

Go away, Lee.

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The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

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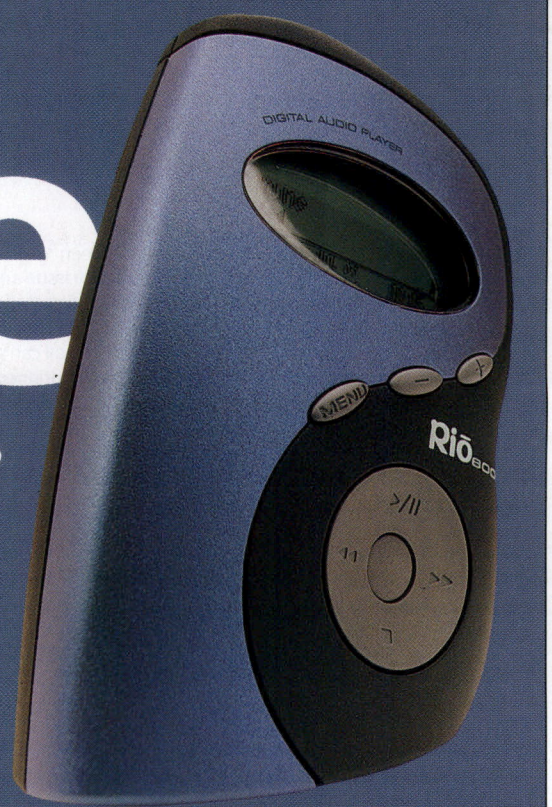
nextmonth »

://On the shelves March 7

The ultimate MP3 guide

The coolest software, the best hardware, and the finest tracks to download



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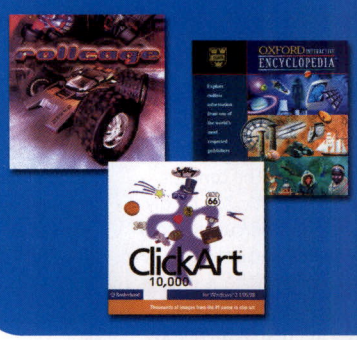

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Dead trees, hard cash

AMAZON ***www.amazon.com*** Why the world's biggest e-tailer is never out of the headlines

IF EVER A SITE WAS MORE THAN A site, it's Amazon. The online book retailer's name has become so synonymous with e-commerce that almost every Web entrepreneur names it as a business model. Its delivery systems and site layout have been replicated right across the Net and its record customer figures make it a flagship, carrying the beacon of cyber-capitalism into more homes than any other.

Which is why, when Amazon first announced that it, er, wasn't making a profit, the resultant bowel-loosening was clearly audible throughout Silicon Valley. Web sceptics have been quick to seize on the news as evidence of the dot com revolution's impending downfall; others claim Amazon just isn't as good as it was cracked up to be.

Steve Frazier, MD of Amazon UK, rejects both arguments: 'It's a well-known fact that we don't make a profit. Pieces of our business make a profit, and we certainly have a plan to bring them all into profit. Building a big business requires large losses...we'll expand and continue to add new projects. Our service will continue to improve in order to make a profit.'

Either way, there's no denying the impact Amazon has made since it first opened its virtual doors back in the summer of 1995. The concept was simple and realistic, but hardly earth-shattering: undercutting book retailers by building an online business to cope with thousands of customers. Long-serving CEO and joint founder Jeff Bezos can hardly have anticipated the ensuing rush, however: before most sites had explored the concept of e-commerce, Amazon was competing for traffic with the Yahoo!s of this world and attracting headlines for customer numbers.

Most of that initial success was down to the two fundamentals of successful retailing: cost and service. The generous prices Amazon was prepared to offer, particularly on new books, shook up the entire market, both online and off, driving dedicated readers (who were always likely to be Web users, anyway) out of the shops and onto the Net.

'It didn't happen by magic,' says Frazier. 'We employ a wide range of tools – including marketing and advertising – to get our word across, and we use word of mouth as well. Plus we deliver. When people order, we do what we say we will.'

Amazon's home page has changed little over the years, and is as useful as anything in pinpointing the company's success. Everything, as Amazon's frequently at pains to point out, is only a click away: follow the link to the book of your choice and you'll find price, author details and the pioneering user reviews system which allows you to browse other readers' comments and ratings before you buy.

:AMAZON

WHAT IS IT?
Pioneering e-tailer offering books, music, hardware, software and gifts to over 160 countries

LAUNCHED
July 1995

TRAFFIC
The world's most popular e-commerce site, with 25 million different customers spending an average of $130 each a year

BASE
Seattle, Washington

KEY FEATURES
Reviews and ratings of every book in its database (1.2 million in Britain alone), a range of auctions, second-hand books, user personalisation

The road to riches hasn't been without controversy, however. The trade press and independent analysts have slated both Amazon's business plan and customer services model, while others, including the increasingly fervent noamazon.com (an anti-Amazon site), have criticised its patenting of a 'one-click' system, the privacy of registered users' details and its managing of reviews.

It hasn't done the business any harm. From its bookish origins, Amazon has rapidly expanded into music, DVD, video, hardware, software and online auctioneering. Separate German, Japanese and French sites followed the launch of a UK arm in 1998 (a buyout of Bookpages.co.uk gave Amazon a ready-made British business). 'We needed to sell directly to local people,' explains Frazier. Worldwide, sales are topping $3 billion a year, and the company remains a big Nasdaq draw.

So why no profits yet? Amazon has been the victim of constant speculation by analysts and experts ever since its inception, with conflicting figures and predictions adding to the general confusion. For its part, the company has played it cool, maintaining the business is a long-term concern rather than a short-term cash cow. The rest of the dot com world can't afford to be so laid-back: to them, Amazon's success is a matter of life or death. The Internet won't kill books, but books could well kill the Internet.

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

Balancing books: Amazon MD Steve Frazier's light reading

brightsparks»

:// People doing great things online

You'll be hearing from our lawyers...

www.freelawyer.co.uk

'How many people have had their rights trampled because access to legal information is so difficult?'

Alex Mehta doesn't bang the table as he makes the point, which is perhaps a good thing given he's a former boxer who represented England at the 1998 Commonwealth Games. But there's a passion behind the voice which betrays a very personal crusade.

'My dad worked on the factory line in Birmingham for 10 years, but one Friday he was made redundant,' he explains. Alex Mehta Senior sought High Street legal advice but 'felt he was in a shark pool'.

Perhaps fortunately, Mehta was a barrister. He quickly mugged up on the subject, lodged a tribunal application and the firm backed down, re-appointing his father. But a fire had been lit under Mehta and he found a sympathiser in fellow barrister Leon de Costa. Together they determined to set up a jargon-free, interactive legal Web site – Freelawyer.

Alex sought High Street legal advice, but felt it was a shark pool

'Although the job of a barrister is one of the most highly-skilled, a lot of it can be automated with clever software,' explains de Costa. With a professor of Artificial Intelligence on the advisory panel, there's no shortage of that. Site visitors answer questions posed by a 'virtualawyer', and receive a tailored sheet of legal information and guidance on local specialist solicitors from whom to get no-obligation, free estimates of legal costs if the case were to be taken further. And it's proving immensely popular: 48,000 sessions in December brought half a million page views.

'Law has always been impenetrable until Freelawyer appeared,' says Mehta. 'I'll take the Pepsi challenge; our legal content beats anything else on the Internet. It's Oxford PhD-level law written in a 12-year-old's language.' de Costa chips in: 'The Internet was supposed to democratise information, and this is one of the sites which genuinely has done it'.

So where now? New, even better software is in development and continental expansion is a possibility. 'We have a small percentage of a French site and we'd like to build a European site: Germany, Spain, Italy, the big markets,' says de Costa.

But wouldn't the contrasting legal systems cause problems? 'It's easier to do it on the continent,' he says. 'They have code systems whereas in England it's judge-made law. They literally make it up as they go along,' he chortles. A cheery barrister on your side? Now there's the Internet at its finest.

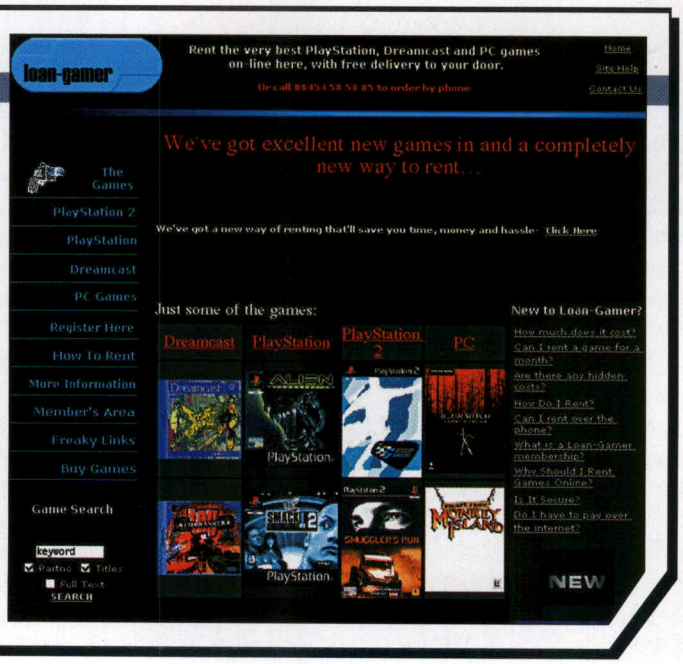
:LOAN GAMER

www.loan-gamer.co.uk

With PC games costing the thick end of 40 quid, it's no longer a no-risk venture to try a new game out.

Which is where Loan-Gamer comes in. As the name suggests, it loans you games and at £4.75 for five days or £9.99 a month, it leaves less of a scar on the bank balance. The next-day free delivery and free return render your pennies even safer, while membership can bring further savings still.

Loan-Gamer stocks top-line games for Dreamcast, PC, PlayStation and even PlayStation 2, if you're lucky enough to have one. With the new batch of PS2 consoles due at Easter, Loan-Gamer's constituency continues to expand...



Old school ties

www.friendsreunited.co.uk

Funny thing, pregnancy. The life changes it brings about make you review your time on the planet. And whenever that happens, you start to wonder 'Whatever happened to...?'.

So it was for Julie Pankhurst, a 34-year-old software engineer from Barnet, when she was in the family way. 'I wondered what my old school friends were doing and I saw the potential for a Web site,' she

Alex Mehta (left) and Leon de Costa: taking the law into your hands

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

explains. 'I realised you could have a database of schools so you could enter your details and get in touch with your friends.'

Julie was the first woman in the UK to do a software engineering apprenticeship and husband Stephen is a software consultant, so building a site was no problem. 'We made it really simple; we loaded up current secondary and primary schools, and within three weeks we had our first successful feedback about friends getting in touch.'

Launching last July, hundreds of visitors add details to the site each week. There are now 16,000 names for 24,000 schools and colleges. A particular favourite is the Memory Board, where ex-pupils discuss their former teachers' foibles.

The concept soon spread to universities and now-defunct schools, which keeps Julie and Stephen busy, but not overly so. 'We put our daughter Amber to bed, Stephen cooks dinner and I update the site for a couple of hours.'

Pankhurst: linking old school pals

It's an idyllic situation and one which Julie is not in a hurry to change. She laughs when asked if she'd go back to her old job. 'Oh no, the site's much more rewarding. Already I feel it's been successful but it'd be nice to get more people registered so it's rewarding for us and for everybody else.'

Besides which, there's more cooking in the Pankhurst household than Friends Reunited, reveals Julie. 'We've got another project we're working on right now...'

DIY SHOPPING ONLINE

Change rooms without leaving the house

It's spring, and fix-it time. But where to go for the cheapest tools on the Net?

SPRING: THE TIME FOR RENEWAL, regeneration – and, er, DIY. No more procrastinating; fix those leaky taps and broken cupboards once and for all. But where to get the necessary equipment and knowledge? We spent a week in January hunting for prices even we couldn't believe, armed with little more than a PC, a mouse and a Net connection.

For a huge range of DIY gear you can't beat Screwfix Direct at ***www.screwfix.com***. Bargains *du jour* when we checked out the site included a Master 800 workbench – a bargain at £74.99, with next day delivery. This excellent site also sells doors, lights, ventilation systems and various security measures. Nothing is too small; all the accoutrements for putting together your bits and pieces can be purchased here, from bolts and nuts to screwdrivers and power drills.

Cookson's (***www.cooksons.com***) – 'For the enthusiast and professional' – also has a wide, well-stocked online shop, with over 50,000 items to choose from. It friendly design anc clear product descriptions make it easy to use, and free delivery on orders over £45 encourages you to spend. DIYTOOLS.COM (***www.diy-tools.com***) also has free delivery, this time on orders over £30. The site is informative with loads of special offers and sells some household goods (such as vacuum cleaners, fans) too, although the slow page- loading was a bind.

Toolfast Supplies (***www.toolfast.co.uk***) is another site that's easy to use, with products clearly pictured. The special offers were, indeed, quite special; a DeWalt rotary hammer was on sale for £99, down from £235.

BLACK & DECKER 12V CORDLESS DRILL £89.99

www.homebase.co.uk

We saved a hefty £40 by switching from Homebase to B&Q – even if the latter's pages were loading oh-so-slooowwwly at the time of our shoparound.

The high street DIY names have made it online, with varying degrees of success. B&Q has a great address – ***www.diy.co.uk*** – but a not-so-great site. You can't purchase online; instead, browse for products that are available in the stores, or get DIY advice. The product search did unearth a bargain: a Black & Decker 12v cordless drill on sale at Homebase (***www.homebase.co.uk***) for £89.99 was available for £49.98 at B&Q, although the slow-loading pages at B&Q's site makes it time-consuming to search and you'll still have to haul yourself down to the shops. The Homebase site was quick and easy to navigate, with a good range of products.

Focus Do It All's (***www.focus-doitall.co.uk***) site is clearly laid out and as well as online shopping, there are DIY tips and Design Ideas, albeit with the slightly worrying description 'challenging ways to liven up our homes!'. Great Mills (***www.greatmills.co.uk***) however, has DIY tips – 'Insulating your home' when we visited – and advertises special offers, but from stores only: there's no online shopping.

Among the expert sites offering more in-depth information and specialist products is Plumb World at ***www.plumbworld.co.uk***. Packed with all manner of plumbing products (funnily enough), ranging from pipe cutters to pressure gauges, at reasonable prices, the site is clear and easy to navigate. Puzzled as to how to achieve the cracked and glazed look? Visit Decorating Direct at ***www.decoratingdirect.co.uk*** with its huge variety of paints, papers and decorative effects.

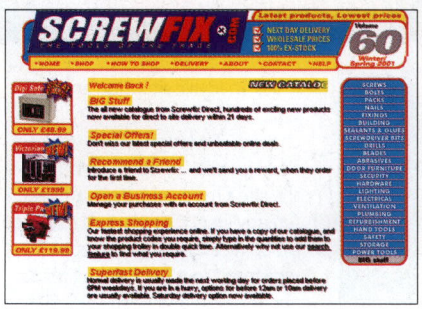
If enthusiasm heavily outweighs any DIY, er, skills, the Internet can come to your rescue. Check out books on DIY at ***www.amazon.co.uk***, or visit Diy Fix It (***www.diyfixit.co.uk***). It's well laid out, with problems divided into categories. Soothing and calming, it's there to wipe your brow; just the thing when you've inadvertently taken out a load-bearing wall. The Natural Handyman at ***www.naturalhandyman.com*** – 'A feast of home repair help, humor and encouragement' – will also come to your rescue. From the huge list of potential trouble spots, select your problem and follow the clearly-written advice.

So you've got the kit, you know how to do it – but you're not sure what to do. For ideas, check out Hands-On-Live.com (***www.hands-on-live.com***) for simple decorating tips.

But if you've decided to get in the 'pros' (and we use that term loosely), ensure you're not getting ripped off by visiting Quote Checkers at ***www.quotecheckers.co.uk***. Send your quote to them and their experts will tell you how much it should cost.

So no more excuses. All the above sites which sell online have a good selection of products – and we have proof that it's worth comparing prices; as with the high street, costs vary widely. And if you weren't an expert before, you should be after sifting through this little lot.

;-) Our favourite DIY sites



SCREWFIX

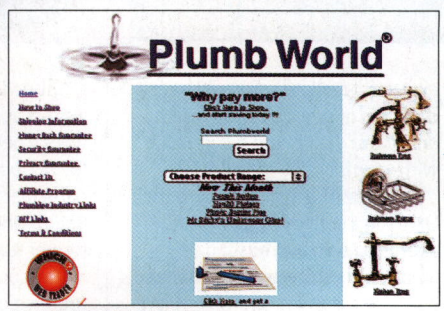
www.screwfix.com. ★★★★★

Consistently excellent site with good bargains, and easy navigation.

DECORATING DIRECT

www.decoratingdirect.co.uk ★★★★

Large variety of paints, wallpapers and decorative effects, plus the necessary tools.



PLUMB WORLD

www.plumbworld.co.uk ★★★★

All plumbing-related materials are on sale here – a wide choice at good prices.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

PAINT FROM £5.99

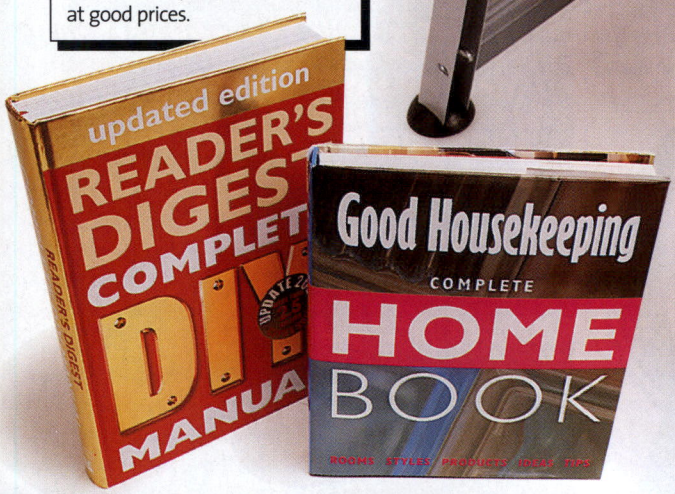
www.focusdoitall.co.uk

Home decorating tips are on offer at Focus Do It All's site, along with a limited range of products and store locaters to show you where to get it if it's not available online.

DIY BOOKS FROM £15.99

www.amazon.co.uk

Can you ever have too much help when tackling DIY projects? No, probably not, so stock up on a few manuals. Amazon has a DIY section with a wide range of books that will (hopefully) be more of a help than a hindrance, at good prices.



WORKBENCH £74.99

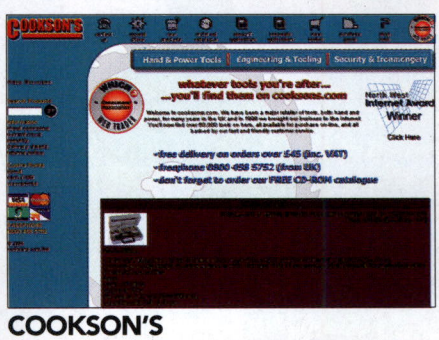
www.screwfix.com

From nails to workbenches, this is one of the (many) bargains to be had from Screwfix Direct, one of the best and most comprehensive sites on the Web. It offers next day delivery, too.

HOMEBASE

www.homebase.co.uk ★★★★★

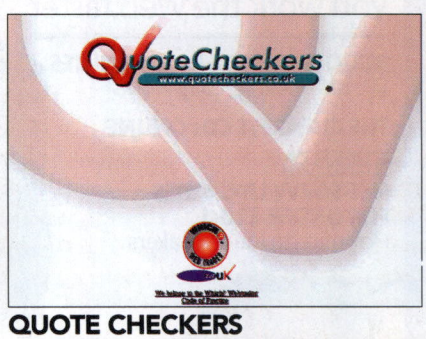
Quick and easy to use, a selection of essential DIY products can be purchased here.



COOKSON'S

www.cooksons.com ★★★★

Comprehensive selection of DIY paraphernalia, with free delivery on orders over £45.



QUOTE CHECKERS

www.quotecheckers.co.uk ★★★★★

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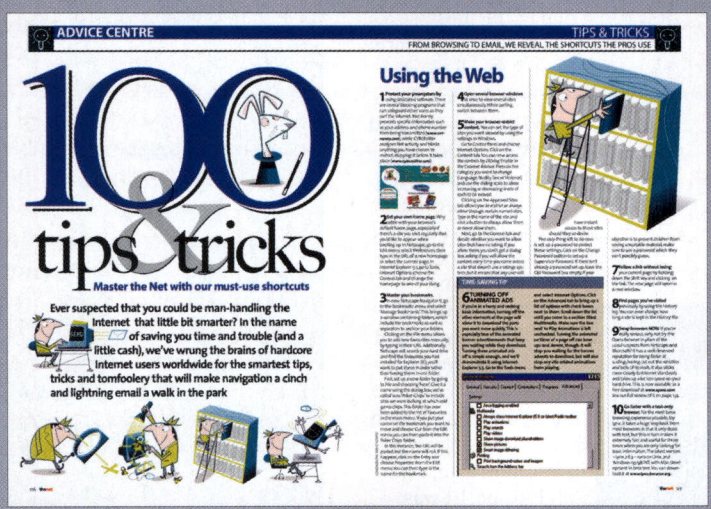
ADVICE CENTRE TIPS & TRICKS

FROM BROWSING TO EMAIL, WE REVEAL THE SHORTCUTS THE PROS USE

100 tips & tricks

Master the Net with our must-use shortcuts

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Using the Web

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It doesn't have to be like this...

The bubble's burst – yet one in 10 of you has a great dot com idea. We reveal how to launch a successful e-business now that the party's over

A CONVERTED WAREHOUSE in London's Clerkenwell, and motorcycle couriers are revving up their dinky Hondas preparing to deliver instant gratification to the capital's bright young things. Tequila and Twister; fags, pharmaceuticals and fashion; gadgets, gifts and goodies; more than 750 carefully-selected luxuries, necessities and household staples, stacked high in an impossibly tiny storage cupboard, waiting for your order. Web it, WAP it or just pick up the phone. Craving a bottle of champagne and a box of chocolates? (Would you like a Wild Boar Terrine with that and perhaps something for the weekend, sir?). We'll have it with you within the hour.

This is Zapitover, a dot com start-up planning to strike it rich by pandering to London's 'time poor/money rich'; those who want a bottle of Veuve Cliquot and want it NOW! Business has grown steadily since its launch in October last year, but while we undoubtedly live in impatient and consumerist times, Zapitover is only taking an average of 250 orders a week: hardly enough to make its owners the next dot com millionaires. So what chances does it have of thriving at a time when high-profile Internet retailers seem to be imploding on a weekly basis?

Current orthodoxy says you're three Ws short of a URL if you so much as think about launching an e-business in the current climate, that overnight Internet millionaires are a thing of the past. eToys and Letsbuyit.com are the latest big-name victims of the dot com malaise and many of those still in the game have seen their share price destroyed in recent months. Even First Tuesday, the organisation that puts dot com ideas in touch with money – and claims to have raised $150 million in seed finance for its members since its launch just over two years ago – announced a series of redundancies in January. What's gone wrong? And what if you've got a great idea, a multi-million pound idea? Is there no hope? And if you can convince someone to put up the money to get you started, how can you avoid making the same mistakes as Boxman, Boo and Clickmango?

Happy days: Boo owner Ed Whitehead, before the company's failure

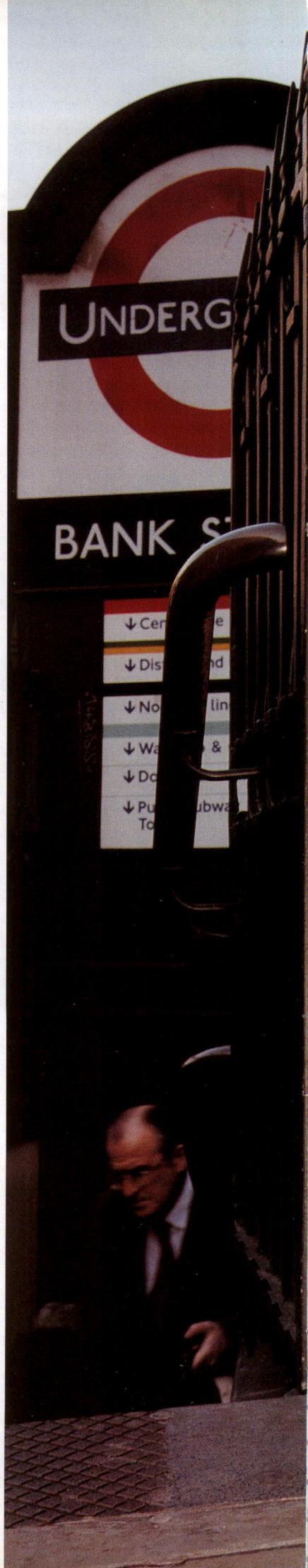
It was like, if you're not in the Internet then you're not a real person anymore

JOHN SMITH, BAIN LAB EUROPE

Blame it all on Jim Clark. In 1996, Clark, the co-founder of Netscape, took the company public after just 18 months in existence. Three months later, its shares were trading at $140 each, he was a billionaire, his employees – who all had shares in the company – were multi-millionaires. Although Netscape had never made a profit and no-one was sure if it ever would, it was the one of the most successful public offerings in the history of the US Stock Market and changed the rules forever. Nobody wanted to miss out next time round. Little wonder the dot com market started to get a little frenzied in the USA. The UK didn't take long to catch up. 'It was the second half of 1999 when it started to become obvious there was a snowballing trend and one that you couldn't ignore,' says John Smith, director of Bain & Co's Internet investment arm, Bain Lab Europe. 'It was like, if you're not in the Internet then you're not a real person anymore; the world was totally Internet-based and everything else was pre-railroad, horse and cart. It was an infectious mentality. There was such a frenzy and a feeling that the window would close rapidly if you didn't get into the marketplace and dominate.'

Smith says there was a rush to scale, a land grab: in other words, people forgot about the bottom line and just spent millions trying to dominate the market. 'There was no focus on profit,' he adds. 'Well, there was, but it was on page 10 of the business plan and most people thought it was such an important wave to ride, they should ride it as high and as fast as they could and worry about profits later.'

And so, eager for a slice of the cake, investors simply weren't »



WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

FAILED DOT COM
MILLIONAIRE
PLEASE GIVE GENEROUSLY

being very discriminating. With too much money chasing too little opportunity, people were throwing their cash in equal quantities into good and bad ideas. To make matters worse, few of the people with the ideas were trying to build stable businesses; they thought they'd found a get rich quick scheme and were trying to build a big enough company to take to the stock market and become a millionaire overnight.

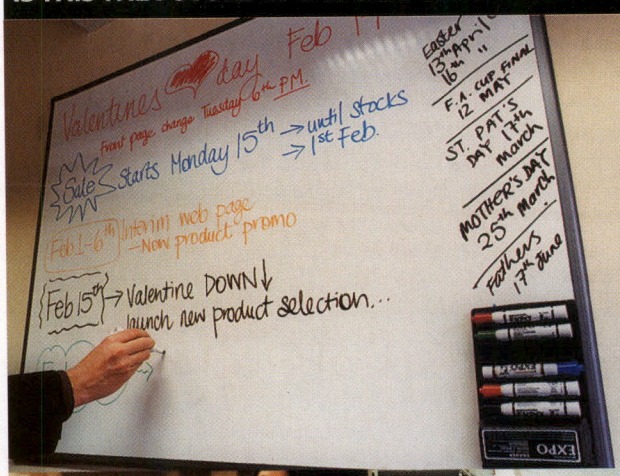
John Beddoe, an analyst at Seymour Pierce, says the bubble began to burst around March last year, with the fuss surrounding Lastminute.com, whose co-founders Martha Lane-Fox Brent and Hoberman ended up £140m richer after it went public – albeit on paper and temporarily. 'People were asking how such companies were going to generate revenue and found that a lot of them didn't have the ability to do that. They still don't. Some of these sites would have taken 200 years to break even.'

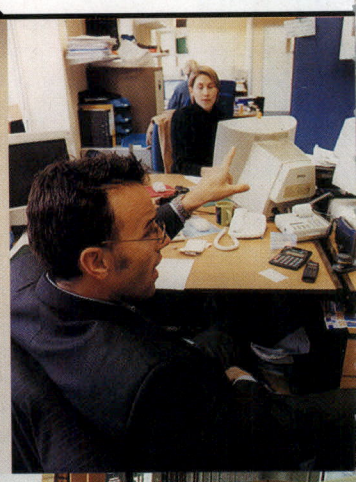
Things look extremely bleak for anyone burning to get their idea off the ground, but not everyone is as pessimistic as Beddoe, who says: 'If you're a complete start-up, forget it. The Internet does have a future but not at the moment; everyone's had their fingers burned.'

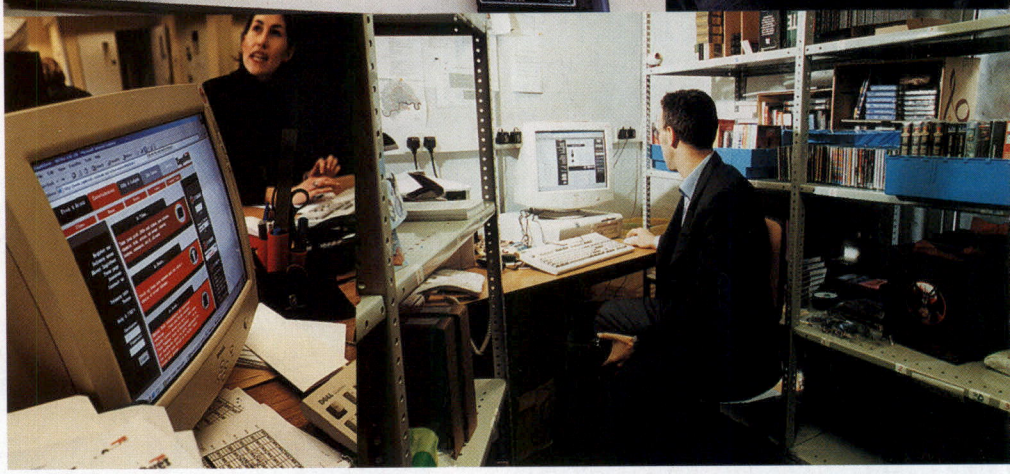
Others, such as Smith, say the money's out there and good ideas with business plans will still get funding: indeed, good ideas will get more money than before, as back then a lot was being wasted on bad ones.

If there's loot still out there for the taking, and you've got a brilliant idea, what's your next move? Typically, your first step is to attract first round, or 'seed', funding – say, half-a-million to get you through initial Web development and to put a management team in place – and that means approaching venture capitalists, business angels, or incubators, or finding a management team who'll risk their own shirts. But in a sceptical climate, a good idea means more than a doodle on the back of an envelope. 'You can't just show up with a four or five-page business plan saying "I'm about to leave my job, I have this great idea, this will make millions, will you back me for a million or two?"' says Smith. 'Those days are gone.'

IS THIS THE FUTURE OF DOTCOM COMPANIES? >>







In the past, first round funding was a cinch, but when dot coms came back for a second or third bite of the cake, investors started to look more closely at the numbers, and that's when money got tighter. Today, you need to get it right from the start.

IT WAS FAILURE TO MAKE A PROFIT soon enough that killed Zapitover's rivals, Urbanfetch and Bagsoftime. But managing director Elliot Ronald is sad to see them go, not because Zapitover is next in line but because he thinks competition is good: 'We'd be very happy for new competitors to start up because it raises awareness of the concept and the issue at the moment is that Londoners aren't nearly as developed in their thinking about convenience and service as New York.'

This self-assured 26-year-old, a former management consultant with Ernst and

ENTREPRENEURS WHO STRUCK GOLD...

THE WINNERS >>

Drummond: down to his last £18 million, poor lamb

PETER WILKINSON
Planet Online, Planetfootball, InTechnology
Often described as a serial entrepreneur, Wilkinson founded Planet Online in 1995 with £10 million backing from fellow Yorkshireman Paul Sykes. He made £25 million when Planet Online was sold to Energis in 1998. Very shrewdly, Wilkinson held on to the site and, not content to make one fortune, merged it with Sports Internet for shares worth £24 million. When Sports Internet was sold to BskyB, he was left holding some £127.5 million of its shares. And that's just for starters. Other online and offline ventures mean his total worth was estimated at £450 million last year.

DYLAN WILK
Gameplay
Famously started his mail-order computer game business in 1994 from his bedroom on a council estate in Leeds with a £2,500 loan from The Prince's Trust. Saw the potential of extra sales online and joined up with Gameplay. He took £2.6 million out of the deal and five per-cent of the company, worth about £16 million last year, but closer to £3 million today. The 26 year old likes fast cars and bought a Ferrari 355 but was banned for speeding.

JASON DRUMMOND
Virtual Internet
Poor old Jason Drummond, founder of Virtual Internet, the domain-name outfit, has seen his shares fall from over £130million last year to more like £18million today, but that hardly makes him a loser. The 31 year old set up his first computer company while still at school in London, and went through several technology companies before founding Virtual Internet in 1996, which is one of the few dot coms to make a profit.

Business starts booming at recent start-up Zapitover, the London delivery service, as the staff fill their white board, check on their stock and pinpoint areas for forthcoming expansion on that oh-so-hi-tech map

Young, insists Zapitover won't make the same mistakes and has learnt valuable lessons from where others have gone wrong. He talks slowly and guardedly about his vision. From time to time a note of enthusiasm creeps into his voice, but he knows level-headedness is worth a lot more than enthusiasm now the rules have changed. Ronald was sitting with his then girlfriend one summer evening in 1999 when he first got the idea for Zapitover. He recalls wanting some champagne and chocolates, but not wanting to go out. 'It's one of those things you think when you're drunk. If you can get pizzas delivered, why not other stuff? I'd been reading a lot about wireless and had been thinking: "what would one want to do on the wireless Internet?" and I thought how about doing my shopping in my dead time, on my way home? The two things came together in my head.' The idea fermented for six months, then Ronald met Will Sankey, who happened to be engaged to his girlfriend's sister. Sankey, a former ad executive, persuaded Ronald to join his company, 86 Ltd, a new media consultancy, to help incubate start-ups. Within a few months Ronald's idea had become Zapitover and he started to raise financing just as the dot com bubble burst. He was spurred on by reports that Urbanfetch had received an initial investment of $70 million dollars and he wasn't looking for anything like that kind of money. 'That's an awful lot of money to give what is essentially a shop,' says Ronald. 'That'd be an awful lot of money for Walmart.' So they have a lot less money to burn through than their failed rivals, but what's to stop them meeting the same fate?

Dylan Wilk is a man who might have the answer. Although Wilk, 26, who co-founded Gameplay, has a regular starring role in lists of e-millionaires, he's quick to point out that he is very much an entrepreneur in the traditional mould, rather than an e-entrepreneur. Likewise, he thinks that if a dot com is going to succeed it needs to stop thinking it's any different from any other business. 'The Internet is a channel, rather than a holy grail. I saw there was a great opportunity because of the Internet to build a much larger business, but I never saw Gameplay as being primarily dependent on the Internet. I still don't see a need for creating a pure Net business.

'This is where most Internet businesses have gone wrong; they haven't explored traditional methods of conducting their business and as with everything in business, you have to keep as many options open as you can.'

So Wilk's advice to budding entrepreneurs is to ask themselves why they are creating an e-business in the first place: 'There are very few dot coms that have succeeded and there will continue to be very few that succeed.'

If Zapitover has an edge over other start-ups it might be because it seems to have absorbed these sentiments. Although it's at »

...AND THE ONES THAT HIT SAWDUST

THE LOSERS»

ROBERT NORTON
Clickmango
Twenty-nine-year-old Norton read Modern History at Exeter College, Oxford, before taking a job as Lennox Lewis' PR manager. In 1996, he joined AOL, before leaving to work for a French search engine where he reportedly made a bit of money when it was sold. He then hooked up with an old pal from Oxford, Toby Rowland, son of the late tycoon Tiny Rowland. They persuaded Rowland's family and the Rothschild family to stump up an initial £3m to set up the health site Clickmango. They also persuaded Joanna Lumley to come on board and promote their oatmeal scrubs. Sadly, the *Ab Fab* star couldn't prevent it going spectacularly bust.

DAVE STANWORTH
Games Domain
Dave Stanworth's story is one of rags to riches and rags again (well, almost). Stanworth left school with no qualifications and worked as a bricklayer and a bookie before discovering the Internet. By 1995 he had built Games Domain into one of the most popular sites in the world, selling it in early 1997 for $3m worth of shares in US Attitude Network. Fine so far, but today those same shares have lost over 99 percent of their value, and Stanworth is worth a paltry £25,000.

Norton: where's it gone?

BERNARD ARNAULT
Financier
The 50-year-old French corporate raider and chairman of fashion house Moët Hennessy isn't exactly on the breadline, but he's been hit hard by the bursting of the dot com bubble. In 1999 Arnault announced his intention to sink $500million into Internet start-ups. Unfortunately, things haven't gone according to plan. Two of the companies he gave large amounts to were Boxman and Boo, which both went belly up. A salient lesson to those who think they can double up their old economy money by investing it in the new economy.

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the cutting-edge of WAP technology it also takes orders over the phone. What's more, the success of the company is measured in old-fashioned terms on an old-fashioned whiteboard pinned to the wall where day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month a tally of orders is scrawled in big fat marker pen. Its business plan is now all about watching the bottom line, which is all about avoiding the mistakes others have made. Their competitors had no minimum delivery order, no delivery charge and gave away free gifts with orders.

'The conclusion,' says Ronald, 'was you could order a bottle of cola in West London and someone would pull it out of a £60,000 fridge in a 1,000 square metre warehouse, package it while a computer system printed out a label, then a 500cc motorbike and professional courier driver would carry it across London to deliver it in an hour for £1.50. You don't need to be a management consultant to see the flaw in terms of profitability.'

A good way to save money is to find a business partner who doesn't only offer finance, but other benefits. This wasn't lost on Zapitover's management, who instead of building their own office space and warehouse, approached London's upmarket food delivery service, Deliverance. It helped finance the company, gave Zapitover space in its building, provided logistical experience and a 40,000 strong customer base which could be targeted cheaply with flyers and menus. In return, Deliverance got an Internet presence.

Once you've got the bricks and mortar you need to fill them with flesh and blood. If the new rules for the new economy are essentially the same as the old rules for the old economy, that means investors are now looking for management teams who know what they're doing. 'Last year, people suddenly seemed to believe that there was a group of twenty-somethings who knew more about economics than anyone else in the country,' says Wilk. 'It's laughable now, thinking back to it.'

Zapitover's business plan shows a graph depicting the growth of the UK digital retail market from £0.58bn today to £12.5bn by 2005. But similar predictions have proved fatal to other dot coms.

'Take-up of Internet shopping has been slower than people predicted,' says Wilk. 'A lot of businesses were running as fast as they possibly could towards a target that wasn't really there. They had 12 months' cash, for example, and fully believed that by then the market would be big enough to sustain them, and since they had no contingency, when they ran out of cash there was no way to go back to the market and so the market lost confidence in them as individuals, even if the business model itself still seemed possible.'

Wilk says you have to be prepared to change your business plan if things aren't panning out as expected, or if technology changes. 'In every business you have to be very flexible, especially these days with technology as fast moving as it is. And if you don't spot something for a few months, then you can go out of business.'

Hillary Graves, a founding member of USA-based iVillage, a hugely successful online community for women that makes its money from sponsorship, is now managing director of iVillage UK. She's adamant that the key to success online is taking time to listen to your customers and being prepared to change to meet their likes and dislikes. 'The beauty of the Internet is that you can get instant customer feedback and it's so important to read the feedback, acknowledge it, and then use it in product development.'

It would have taken 200 years for some of these sites to make a profit
JOHN BEDDOE SEYMOUR PIERCE

Although WAP was fundamental to the original vision for Zapitover – so much so that the company was originally called Wapitover – they soon realised their customers weren't using it. Initially the company wasn't going to take any telephone orders at all, but there was a crucial change of mind and it now depends on the phone for 50 percent of orders. In December last year, it changed the name and the business plan has been continually adapted. 'We anticipated WAP to take off more quickly than it did and anticipated the devices to evolve more quickly than they have,' says Ronald. 'I still believe wireless Internet of some form is the future, but not at the moment.'

FOCUS ON THE BOTTOM line, build an experienced management team, make strategic alliances, don't rely on market predictions, be prepared to change, listen to your customers: that's the formula for dot com success now the bubble has burst. It might take you a little longer to make your first million, but if you've got a great idea and you follow these rules the odds of getting there eventually are much better. And it's less likely to be the paper millions that have catapulted twenty-somethings into the headlines recently.

'Keep going, it's as simple as that, for 12 months, and prove that you've got a robust business model that works and doesn't need furious financing,' advises Peter Bradshaw, head of European Internet research at Merrill Lynch. 'The days of people thinking they can get insanely rich very quickly are over.'

'There's been a pretty significant shakeout and a lot of people would say it's for the best,' explains Graves. 'It's not about next week's IPO [Initial Public Offering], and the people who got involved with the Internet based on that were in it for the wrong reason.'

As for Zapitover, well, it has the makings of the perfect post-bubble start-up and, for now at least, it seems to be playing by the right rules. As another load of instant gratification is loaded up – a bottle of Laurent Perrier Rose, 20 Marlboro Lights, a box of chocolates and a Charlie's Angels Gift Set somebody needs right away – you'd be forgiven for thinking it ironic that this business depends on the same mentality that blew the bubble in the first place.

SPEAK DOT COM MILLIONAIRE
THE GLOSSARY>>

Make sure you're not left behind by the 'new economy' with our handy at-a-glance guide to e-commerce speak

AD BANNER An advertisement on a Web site that links to an advertiser's site.
ANGELS Previously successful entrepreneurs who offer financing for new businesses, because they're nice.
B2B Business-to-business sites sell directly to other companies.
B2C Business-to-consumer sites sell to normal shoppers.
CEO Chief Executive Officer (managing director, in other words)
CLICKS-AND-MORTAR A traditional 'bricks-and-mortar' company that has a high street presence as well as an online service.
CTO Chief Technology Officer
FIRST ROUND FUNDING The initial burst of cash required to get a company off the ground.
INCUBATOR A company that helps other businesses to get started, giving them advice, contacts and equipment to help them succeed.
M-COMMERCE Electronic commerce carried out over mobile devices such as WAP phones.
SME A small or medium-sized business
START-UP Completely new Internet business with no bricks-and-mortar behind it.
VC Venture Capitalist: banker or investor with cash to part with.

If you think you know your e-commerce terms, try your hand in a game of hangman at *www.quia.com/hm/18162.html*

'Lastminute.com? What's that?'

Got a killer idea for an online business? The Internet's keenest minds reveal the secrets of success

A GOOD THREE YEARS AFTER THE first 'dot com revolution', the Web is still awash with wannabe millionaires convinced they can make their fortunes online. It isn't that simple, so to find out where e-business stands and how you can make it big, we picked the brains of eight industry experts: representatives of leading dot coms, analysts and consultants who spend their lives making money online.

Do you still feel optimistic about the Internet, given the recent scare stories and share slumps?

DANNY KELLY: I think you'd be mad to be more optimistic than you were two years ago. Back then anything seemed possible. What the last year has done is prove that a lot of things aren't going to be possible. The Internet is the world's liveliest corpse. Taxi drivers, when they find out what you do, can't wait to tell you that it's all over now, but every piece of banking they do and every piece of insurance they take out is all being done on the Internet. Sooner or later, all their information and entertainment will come that way too. The Internet is still the most important innovation in human activity since the printing press and that won't go away.

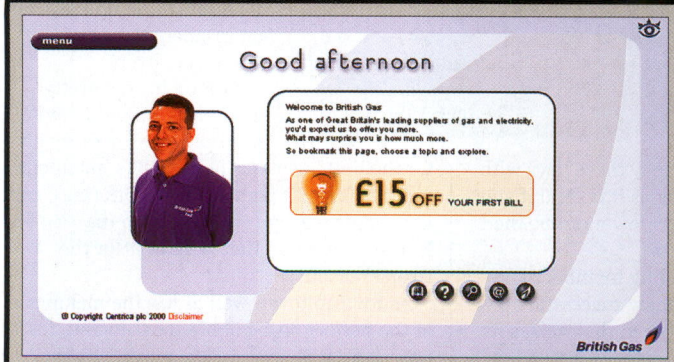
FELICE HAWLEY: The shakeout we've all been waiting for is finally here and it's time to get down to the real hard work.

MATTHEW MILLS: It's not just about ideas any more, it's now about ideas with a business plan and it's much more substantial. Money's not being thrown away any more, and anyone who does come along with a big purse will be much more successful. It's like it was with Boo; [much-feted high-profile Internet crash] if you launched a High Street shop with some stock in the middle of the winter, when nobody was walking the street, you'd go bust very quickly. It's no different just because it's the Internet. This shake-up has got rid of a lot of the rubbish.

TOM FAULKNER: What's happened over the last 12 months or so is that any new ideas are seen as flaky.

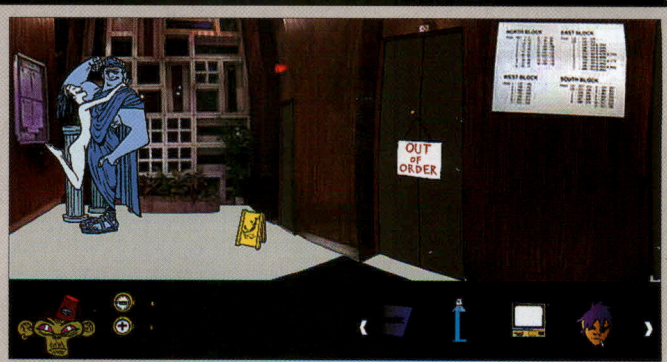
GREG HADFIELD: It's not about

SIX TO WATCH With a little help from our panel, we pick the dot coms to keep an eye on in 2001



1 BRITISH GAS *www.gas.co.uk*

WHAT IS IT? Utilities are full of potential, according to Schoolsnet's Greg Hadfield. With a captive audience desperate to cut their bills and avoid paperwork by getting gas and electricity online, the likes of British Gas, Centrica (***www.centrica.co.uk***), npower ***(www.npower.com)*** and the bill-managing service Servista ***(www.servista.com)*** could well be the sites to watch over the next 12 months.



2 GORILLAZ *www.gorillaz.com*

WHAT IS IT? Hyper-cool 'urban' cartoon/music adventure launched to support an album by hip-hop impresario Dan The Automator. Contains the ongoing adventures of an animated band, plus music. Initially a promotional tool, but early reaction suggests it could take on a life of its own.

WHO'S BEHIND IT? EMI funded an independent animator to produce the site. The question is: will it make money?

optimism, it's about realism; those who took a realistic perspective two years ago have been rewarded.

What are the rules now? How do you become successful?

DK: You still have to ask, within a realistic time frame, can you be the – or one of the – market leaders? The cruel reality is that, although you can still get money for a good idea, there is only a finite amount of revenue cake left out there and there are a lot of people trying to get hold of it. People have to feel pretty sure they can have a market-leading idea.

MM: What we'll see in the next year or two will be conventional business models being applied in a Web way. New business models, which we've seen a large number of, generally fall apart. It's about becoming part of the mix rather than being unique.

DK: The more esoteric ideas will find it harder to find a home and it'll be the proven ways of doing business which succeed.

GH: You don't make money any more from having new ideas; you make money from having a business model that works.

DK: The sad thing is that a year ago, if you had a good idea, you would have gone to a bank and they would have bankrolled it: now, to stand any chance, you have to go to a an established company who'll take it to a venture capitalist and lop off a huge chunk of the cash in return. The money is only really available now for consolidating existing Internet companies.

Money's not being thrown away. This shake-up has got rid of a lot of the rubbish

MATTHEW MILLS

MM: You have to remember there's no such thing as an Internet business. There's a business which uses the Internet. People keep selling this dot com thing and frankly it's bollocks. It's about businesses who use the Internet as their main »

MEET THE PANEL

Our motley crew of Net experts

FELICE HAWLEY
Hoover's Online
UK managing editor for one of the world's most influential business information sites. Hoover's has built itself into an important dot com, supplying info to the likes of AOL.

MATTHEW MILLS
E Proctor & Stevenson
Director of the Internet arm of one of the UK's biggest business consultancies. Advises dot coms on business strategy and raising funding.

TOM FAULKNER
Cricinfo
Business development manager for Cricinfo, a much-lauded start-up which now dominates the cricket market after starting life as a simple newsgroup.

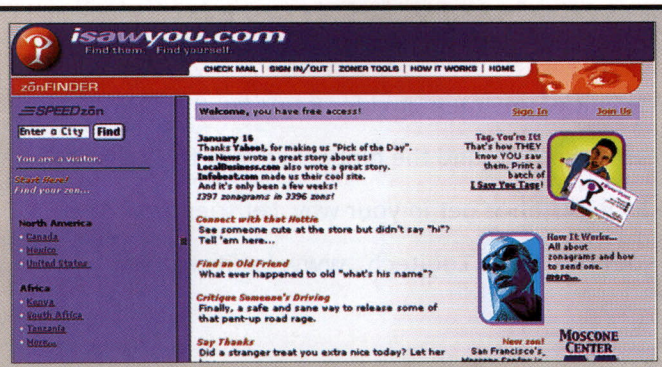
GREG HADFIELD
Schoolsnet
Chairman and editor-in-chief of Schoolsnet, a leading education portal. A former investigative journalist who helped launch Soccernet before selling it to the Disney Corporation.

MATT JONES
Metrius
Director of Metrius, a leading e-business consultancy giving advice to wannabe Internet millionaires. Has previously worked for Lineone and BBC Online.

MARTIN FORREST
Cubitt
Works for a large Internet consultancy, handing out advice on business plans and expansion to the likes of Knowledgepool.com, Somerfield and Energis.

STEVEN BLACKBURN
Gameplay
One of the leading lights in the massively successful games portal Gameplay, which combines retail with online gaming and a thriving community.

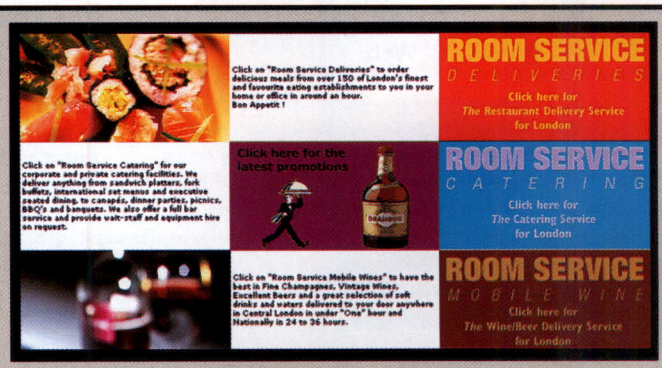
DANNY KELLY
365 Corporation
Former *NME* journalist, *Q* editor and TV presenter who is now publishing director of 365 Corporation, a successful collection of sport and entertainment sites.



3 I SAW YOU *www.isawyou.com*

WHAT IS IT? Making the Web a smaller place by giving surfers the chance to contact people who have entranced or annoyed them in public. If you've fancied a stranger, or had your car dented by a driver, log on and track them down through the Web. 'It sounds daft, but it's got legs,' says Matthew Mills.

WHO'S BEHIND IT? Founded late last year by former Seattle clothes shop owner Varen Swaab.



4 ROOM SERVICE *www.roomservice.co.uk*

WHAT IS IT? Online ordering/delivery services are ten a penny at the moment, but Room Service is the original and the best. Choose a meal from over 150 of the best London restaurants and have it delivered within an hour. With so many menus to peruse, only the Net could do this job.

WHO'S BEHIND IT? Established as an offline business by entrepreneur Ronnie Pearl in 1992 and went online six years later.

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distribution strategy. The majority of my business is for existing companies looking to use the Web and you can't lump them in with this godforsaken dot com thing. There are plenty of other ways of doing it than getting loads of money together, building something and then floating it a week later. There won't be a lot of people left who do that.

STEVEN BLACKBURN: 12 months ago, we [Gameplay] dropped the dot com, which was a big thing, but we are a business and we're available on the phone, too. It makes no great shakes to us. There are some great ideas out there that would only work on the Internet, but generally that's not the case.

FH: A Web site is only a different way of commercialising a business.

Is the Web going to stay as it is? Which platforms are the next ones to watch?

MM: The convergence we're seeing will come to an ultimate end, and we'll see one device for all mediums.

DK: We'll end up with two kinds of communication devices, one for the home and one you keep with you: one little and one big.

FH: That's the next big hurdle most companies have to get over. Just how do you deal with all these different technologies?

MATT JONES: Little bits of technology can make a big difference to businesses.

MM: It's the application of the technology that's exciting, not the technology itself.

DK: There's a spectrum of different technologies, all converging and interconnecting with each other. What the public are going to do is select the bits they want. This is a great time for having a choice.

MARTIN FORREST: The problem still remains, how do you charge your users for services like interactive TV? Will they pay? That's holding everything back.

DK: So far the only thing people have been willing to pay for is pornography, financial information and certain religious broadcasting. Why would that ever change now? You can put whatever Web site up you like now, people aren't going to pay for access to content. Models like that won't work.

GH: As a consumer, if you're making money out of banner advertising then asking me to pay to click everywhere as well, where's the advantage in that for me?

All people pay for is pornography, financial info and certain religious broadcasting

DANNY KELLY

What are the mistakes people have made in building e-businesses?

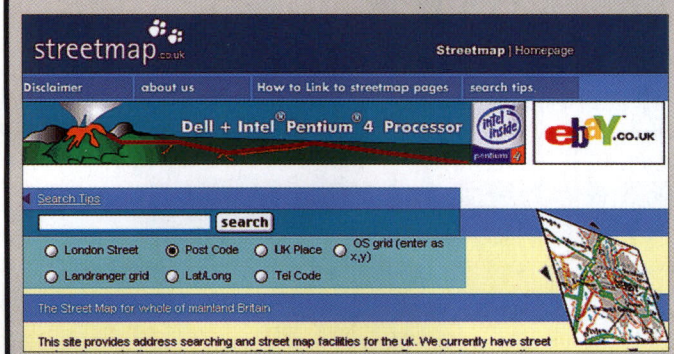
MM: Over the past few years people have been pumping money into these companies that spend on advertising and loss leading; then the money runs out and they're nowhere near profitability.

FH: A lot of people put money into Breathe, but who knows what they did? They were everywhere, they spent all that money building a brand value... We were talking about the Kelkoos and Shopsmarts of this world; comparing prices is great, but you can go to Comet and compare more brands just as easily. That's where that 'unique' part in the idea comes in.

MJ: Napster is a good example of building a brand value through having something that actually works in the first place. That sort of quality is very important on the Net.

GH: When we started Soccernet in 1995, it was getting 23 million page views a month in no time at all with no marketing and no advertising. It »

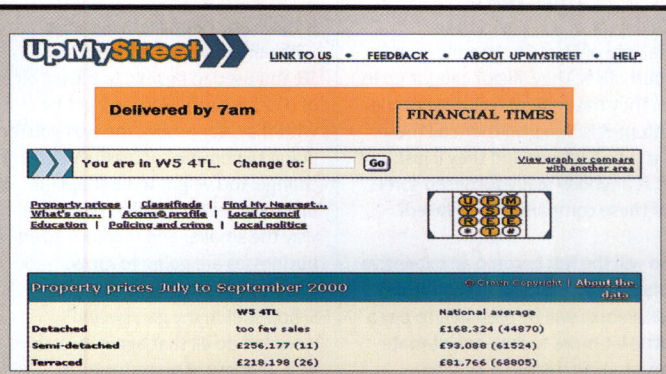
ONES TO WATCH



5 STREETMAP *www.streetmap.co.uk*

WHAT IS IT? Has quickly become a Web essential with its complete, searchable index of UK streets. Search by postcode, road name or location, then scroll through at the detail level you require and print out or email the results to someone. Makes traditional maps redundant.

WHO'S BEHIND IT? Launched in 1998 as a garage industry by Paul Barnborough, who now runs his own company, Btex Ltd.



6 UPMYSTREET *www.upmystreet.com*

WHAT IS IT? Find out everything you need to know about your local (or potential local) area, including house prices, maps, economic information, crime rates and school info, useful addresses and contacts and comparisons with other areas. A wealth of essential facts at your fingertips.

WHO'S BEHIND IT? Started as a 'demonstration' site by consultants Aztec Internet, but has since launched as a limited company.

was so easy in 1995 to 1997 and then everyone else came along. Trying to establish a brand value again in a very different market, the ground has just evaporated. Now you have to spend a lot of money. You attract investors and shareholders by building a brand.

SB: So many people get it wrong. Look at lastminute.com: what is lastminute.com? It's nothing new. They've just been selling last minute holidays online. Big deal! How did that ever get the value it did? How did it get to that level of publicity?

GH: A lot of it is down to the naivety of Fleet Street editors and journalists. They all got caught up in it. They haven't got a clue what the Internet is. You give them all these facts and figures and they'll just buy it. Is anybody really surprised some of these companies have failed?

So will the Net become an expensive place to do business in the future?

DK: People will be prepared to pay a little bit more to have an intimate one-to-one customer service.

GH: It allows you to know more about your customers, and the more you know about them the more you own them. I don't know what I want until someone's told me I want it.

DK: When people learn to trust giving their credit cards details over the Net, that'll be a big thing.

Lastminute is nothing new. They just sell last minute holidays online. Big deal!

STEVEN BLACKBURN

They're happy to give it to an oik down the phone, but they think a machine's going to fiddle them!

Is there any hope for companies with very low start-up costs?

SB: You used to be able to have a bit of passion and vision, and get by with that alone; now, the way you're going to become successful will change. You've got to be snapped up by bigger companies. That's the way the smaller and medium-sized businesses are going to grow.

GH: I had the chance to do Schoolsnet in my garage and I wouldn't do all that again, because that window of opportunity is closing. You may be trying to do it by yourself, but there'll be another guy down the road trying to do it with EMI. You might get away with it for two or three years, but sooner or later you're going to realise you've wasted a lot of your life on it.

MJ: If you're aiming to build something to be acquired or to get out of somehow, that's very different to building a good, steady small business using the Internet to boost your visibility.

What advice can you pass on to others who still want to go into e-business?

GH: Work for another dot com first.

MF: Know your marketplace and learn what you're doing.

MM: There are still a lot of big corporations out there who think they should be doing something on the Internet but don't quite know what, and you can still go to them and tell them what to do.

TF: Always take on people who are better than you.

GH: Accept that you're not going to do something that's going to be number one in the world – you're going to do something that's enjoyable and that adds to the sum of human knowledge.

GRAPHICS
DVD
SOUND
SPEAKERS
CD-RW
Wouldn't it be cool to carry around your entire music collection?
Sorted.
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EAX
DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER
D.A.P JUKEBOX
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PERSONAL DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT
Starts Here.
All Your Music. Wherever You Go.

The cheapest CDs in the world...

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION!

The price war between music e-tailers is seeing the cost of CDs plummet on the Internet. Now that's music to the ears...

YOU BUY YOUR CDs ONLINE because it's cheaper than the high street and saves shoe leather. But are you sure that your favoured online CD superstore is providing the very best value for money?

Once upon a time, buying CDs online was considered the Next Big Thing. In the early days of the Internet explosion, sites offering the latest deals for less were cropping up on an almost daily basis. Such initial excitement has now died down, and a whole rash of shops have been shut in recent months. Yet the Web CD market is still thriving.

Buying chart CDs has now become easier and cheaper than ever before

Almost unnoticed, that cull of stores has resulted in a bitter price war among the survivors, which has made buying chart CDs easier and cheaper than ever. The secret to getting the best deal, however, doesn't lie in sticking to your tried and trusted favourites. By hunting around a bit and occasionally straying from the beaten track, the average music fan can save a small fortune.

To test this premise and to put the market's big-hitters to the sword over delivery times and range on offer, we decided to order the Beatles' (then) recently-released chart-topping compilation *1* and Madonna's *Music* from 12 of the top sites on the Net. We checked out how much each site was charging and proceeded to order online (during the Christmas period, when the postal service is not exactly twiddling its thumbs, for added interest). Then it was a case of sitting back and waiting to see what happened.

We didn't have to wait too long before confirmation of our orders started to come through. One striking thing about the sites is the speed with which they get back to you. Of the 12 sites we used, 10 had emailed back within a few hours of the transaction. One of the two that hadn't confirmed on the day, Jungle.com, made amends 24 hours later, though dear old Woolies just kept you in the dark (adds to the thrill...).

The main attraction of Internet shopping is the price, and our Beatles/Madonna extravaganza did bear this out. »

WORDS: RICHARD TIPPETT; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT, RETNA

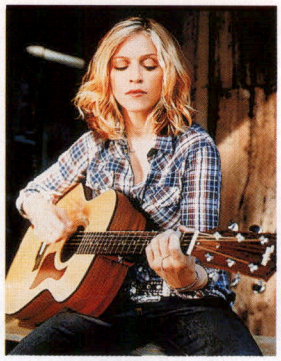
THE BEATLES
CDP 7243 5 29325 2 8

BUYING CDs ONLINE

The high street stores were selling the two CDs, with the odd variation, at a fraction under £14. All the online companies managed cheaper than that, some spectacularly so, others by a whisker. The only site to actually cost more than the high street was, again, poor old Woolworths. Maybe it should stick to pots and pans.

On the subject of price, the devil can sometimes lie in the detail, as you have to remember that on top of the amount you see on screen there's normally a postage/packing/delivery charge which can vary from £1 to £3. If it's coming from the States that'll push the price up a bit, too, though not everyone charges: three of the companies in our survey boasted free delivery. Remember, whichever way you look at it, you're still forking out less than you would in a real store. A price comparison service like kelkoo.com should be able to give you a total cost for your transaction, including postage, across a whole range of sites.

Another big plus point of buying CDs online is that some of the sites give you the chance to listen to clips of the music before you buy: a 10- or 20-second snatch could swing your decision one way or the other. Very handy if you're a bit undecided and an opportunity that doesn't come very easily in a crowded high street emporium.



Whichever way you look at it, you're still forking out less

The listening facility is often backed up by informed customer reviews, so you can read what other people have said about the album you're thinking of buying. Amazon's excellent feedback section comes to mind. In the research stakes, many sites now offer comprehensive back catalogue info. This is particularly strong on the specialist music sites.

The sites we chose for our test were a mixture of the established and the young tyros. Seated in the establishment corner were the likes of HMV, Tower, WH Smith, Virgin and Woolworths, while seeking a place at the top table were audiostreet, jungle, 101CD, cduniverse and CDwow. We also tested out Amazon and BooksOnline (Bol), which would have been in the second group not so long ago.

Apart from one or two notable exceptions, the whole process ran pretty smoothly from start to finish. Judging from our survey, it looks as if the sites have got their acts together. A few surprising details did come to light. Did you know that Virginmega.com is something completely different from Virgin.net? And that one of the 'smaller' names has a very comfy relationship with Mr Branson? Or that at Tower.co.uk your pounds magically turn into dollars? And that Woolies may be behind the rest of the field but they do include a lovely big poster with your CDs?

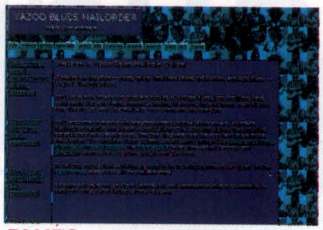
THE CD STORES GO HEAD TO HEAD

	NAME	BEATLES	MADONNA	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
	101CD	£9.98	£9.99	£1	£20.97	1 day	1 day
	www.101cd.com Discount CD retailer rapidly approaching veteran status						
	After CD-wow and Virgin, 101cd turned out to be the best value for money. It's a very straightforward site and you can order stuff with no fuss (Jungle, take note). The music on offer is all-encompassing. There's loads of stuff listed on the homepage including 'best buys from different labels', 'imports' and 'sounds of the seventies and eighties'. Recommended.						
	AMAZON	£9.99	£9.99	£2.08	£22.06	1 day	1 day
	www.amazon.co.uk Uber-retailer of music, books, gadgets and software						
	As you'd expect, the site features the clear, concise presentation of its better-known books section. There's everything on offer, from the obvious stuff to children's music and even lounge, nostalgia and exotica. It's nice and easy to order, walking you through step by step. Despatch was prompt, too, but the postage and packing of over £2.08 was more than many.						
	AUDIOSTREET	£11.99	£11.99	Free	£23.98	Not specified	1 day
BEST FOR CHOICE	**www.audiostreet.co.uk Music arm of the massive Streets Online retail group**						
	Possibly the best looking of the sites, with three uncluttered columns of CD ideas. Big reviews and sound clips to help you decide what to buy. We were able to order our two CDs quicker here than anywhere else. The enticing words 'free delivery' are guaranteed to rope you in, though at nearly £12 each they're not the cheapest CDs around. Swings and roundabouts?						
	BOL	£10.99	£9.99	£1	£21.98	Not specified	1 day
	www.bol.com Well-backed Amazon lookalike. A relative newcomer to the market						
	A nice touch from this straightforward site was to have a contact name on the order confirmation. They even sent an email confirming despatch after the CDs had arrived. Although ordered first class, Bol.com sent the package 'special delivery'; a nice touch, but if no-one had been around to sign for it, presumably the postie would have taken it away again.						
	CD UNIVERSE	£8.75	£10.68	£5.74	£25.17	Not specified	26 days
	www.cduniverse.com Discount retailer which now offers games and DVDs						
	Comprehensive site, with prices in dollars. The CDs were the slowest to arrive and then some. After a week's wait, an email informed us 'no record of order', followed by a girl at Support telling us 'We're waiting for a cheque' (when we'd ordered by Visa). Outcome: late, late arrival of music – and be careful to read CD Universe's small print on the confirmation email.						
	CD-WOW	£8.99	£8.99	Free	£17.98	5-7 days	6 (M), 13 (B)
BEST FOR VALUE	**cd-wow.com A newcomer which has made a quick impact on the CD market**						
	Pricewise, this is the site to be seen at. A total including pp for two CDs of just £17.98 is a whopping 10 quid cheaper than the average high street price. The site's straightforward enough, with cover pics neatly arranged next to the CDs: new releases, top 20 and pre-order. They take a bit longer to arrive than others, because they're shipped from Hong Kong.						

DELIVERY (p) = promised; **DELIVERY** (a) = actual; **(M)** = Madonna; **(B)** = Beatles

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING A BIT SPECIAL?

THE BEST RETAIL SITES FOR THE SPECIALIST LISTENER



BLUES *yazoobluesmailorder.com*
Hard to argue with the introductory words of this superior site: 'If you're into the blues – deep, gritty, traditional blues, delta blues, acoustic blues – you're in the right place!' You can browse its complete catalogue of vintage blues, traditional jazz and world music CDs. It's not too busy and it's easy to find your way around. Also features great old photos.

CLASSICAL *olympia-cd.com*
Announces itself very brashly, with big bold letters and spinning CDs that signal you further into the site. Olympia's been around since 1987 and now has an enviable catalogue, which includes many rarely-heard pieces that are hard to trace elsewhere, on-line or off.

JAZZ *Smoothsounds.com*
As its name suggests, this site goes for the 'cooler' side of jazz,and includes a pre-release section listing CDs scheduled week by week throughout the month. Also features an interesting 'Label of the Month' section and the latest in new age releases. Big bonus: you can listen before you buy.

DANCE *HTFR.co.uk*
Stands for Hard To Find Records and specialises in supplying all types of new and deleted house, garage, techno, electro, disco, funk, soul and hip-hop. HTFR's been around now for a decade, and apart from CDs also specialises in vinyl.

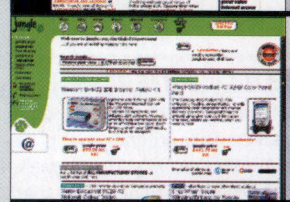
METAL *vinyltap.co.uk*
Vinyltap is based at the Minerva works in Huddersfield, so you immediately feel at home with its heavy credentials. It deals in just about any head-banging stonker, rare or otherwise. Also has a handy A-Z artists' list (how on earth did Cliff Richard get in there?).

FOLK *musikfolk.com*
A wonderfully amateur-looking effort that strongly evokes a feeling of standing around with a finger in your ear and a folky croon in your throat. Features CDs from four specialist fields: folk, folk-rock, Celtic and acoustic. Musikfolk is well established (the company's been around for 10 years) and includes a back-catalogue, CD offers and a special site for Fairport Convention.

NAME	BEATLES	MADONNA	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
HMV	£12.79	£12.79	£1.40	£26.98	2-3 days	1 day

www.hmv.co.uk Web arm of the high street favourites
HMV's total is nearly £10 more than cd-wow's and the site is boring to visit, but it does at least point you to a clearly-marked section of CDs under a tenner and we've had an order confirmed within 10 minutes of placing it. The confirmation included an offer to save £3 when you next spend £30 at the site , which at least makes up for the p&p charges.

JUNGLE	£10.99	£10.99	£2.35	£24.33	2-3 days	2 days



www.jungle.com Heavily-advertised entertainment portal offering music, games and hardware
With Jungle you get free delivery, but only if you spend over £47. We were charged a £2.35 p&p, the steepest in the UK apart from Woolworths. The site is messy and unfocussed, with unclear icons over a dull background and no clear guide to music categories. It also has an unnatural interest in your bank, with a further card verification just when you think it's all over.

TOWER RECORDS	£9.35	£9.35	£6.75	£25.45	Not specified	1 day

www.towerrecords.co.uk The massive CD specialist's online arm
Rather oddly, prices are in dollars, so you can only pay with a credit card and for our order, we were charged an extra $10 for airmail! We rang Tower's online team to ask why. 'Well, it's coming from America, isn't it?' they said. Ask a silly question...The knock-on effect is that your CDs take ages to arrive. The site's home page is quite bitty and uninformative.

VIRGIN	£8.99	£8.99	Free	£17.98	2-3 days	2 days

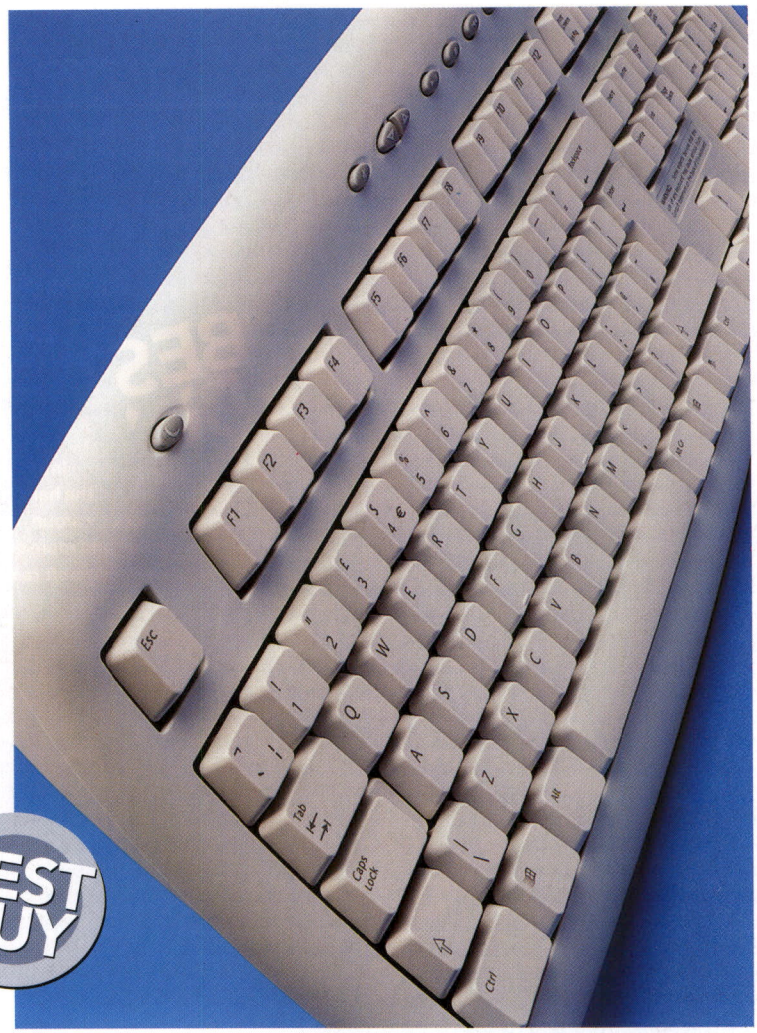
www.virgin.net The bearded wonder takes a foray into online retail
The cheapest deal in the survey, along with cd-wow. That's because CD-wow is Virgin's 'recommended Web site' so the two's prices go hand in hand. Be careful not to type in 'virginmega.com' for your CDs, because that's the American online service and you'll be charged in dollars, etc. The site's full of life with newsy bits and album review pointers on the homepage.

WH SMITH	£10.99	£10.99	£1.77	£23.75	Not specified	20 days

www.whsmith.co.uk After initial teething troubles, Smiths now has its site finished
After a long gap with no news (and no CDs), WH Smith emailed us saying there was a problem with our card. It seems their bank phones yours to check your card's legit, but because it's all automated they can't give you a reason why the transaction should be blocked. The site itself is standard fare, though the 'listening post' weekly audio clip is interesting.

WOOLWORTHS	£12.99	£12.99	£2.95	£28.93	Not specified	2 days

www.woolworths.com Good old Woolies joins the cyber revolution
If all sites were like Woolworths', the high street stores would be laughing: a staggering £28.93 bill for our two discs and a homepage looks like it's been put together by a child with a crayon. There were lots of forms to fill in and there was no email confirmation. Our CDs turned up two days later. And with a giant poster of Madonna! Now, no one else had thought of that...



MICROSOFT NATURAL KEYBOARD PRO £35

Microsoft's Natural Keyboard Pro is the king of Internet keyboards. This baby has an impressive range of 19 hotkeys across the top, seven of which are dedicated to the Internet and replicate the icons at the top of the Internet Explorer browser. Other keys give you one-touch access to your email and for controlling multimedia devices such as a DVD-Rom drive. The keyboard itself is designed for comfort and ease of use, with two blocks of angled keys, which take getting used to but make for extra comfort in the long run.
www.logitech.com/uk

BEST BUY

LOGITECH CORDLESS DESKTOP ITOUCH £60

This keyboard uses Logitech's digital radio technology to provide a remote link to your PC, so you can sit back in your chair while browsing, without worrying about stretching any cables and pulling your PC off your desk. A selection of hot keys along the top include one for one-touch Internet access, and others to speed up navigation, such as forward and back buttons, which mean you can leave your mouse on the desk as well. ***www.logitech.com/uk***

APPLE PRO KEYBOARD £40

If you've got an original iMac, then you're possibly one of the people who bemoan the machine's stylish but cramped cut-down keyboard. Your irritation won't be helped by Apple's decision to scrap this model and replace it with a full sized number on its recent releases, apparently after complaints from those dedicated Mac users, designers. But fear not, you can now chuck your old keyboard and replace it with this larger, fully specified Pro keyboard for a very reasonable price.
www.apple.com/uk

LOGITECH CORDLESS DESKTOP PRO £80

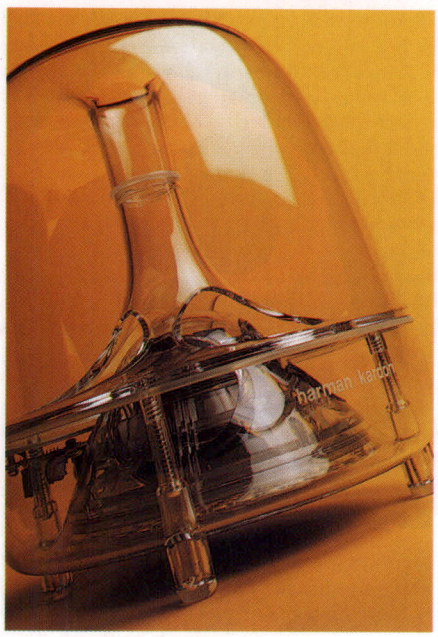
Like Logitech's Cordless Desktop ITouch, the Pro model uses digital radio technology to provide a remote link with your PC. The one major difference is the Pro's contoured keyboard layout, designed for maximum comfort. Yes, it's one of those odd keyboards where the keys are laid out in two blocks, and angled toward each other, although it is still a QWERTY layout. It takes some getting used to, but it's well worth the effort for those who type a lot. ***www.logitech.com/uk***

CREATIVE LABS DESKTOP THEATRE DTT3500 £200

BEST BUY

PC speakers have come a long way in a short time. Once they managed to get out of the case and onto your desktop, designers and engineers could do whatever they wanted. Currently at the top of the evolutionary tree is this set of Dolby Digital capable surround sound speakers from Creative Labs. Okay, so surround sound is a little bit over the top when it comes to browsing Web sites – we'll have to wait for serious broadband capacity for that – but online gamers will love them and if you watch DVDs on your PC, then they're ideal.

www.creative-labs.co.uk



APPLE ISUB £70

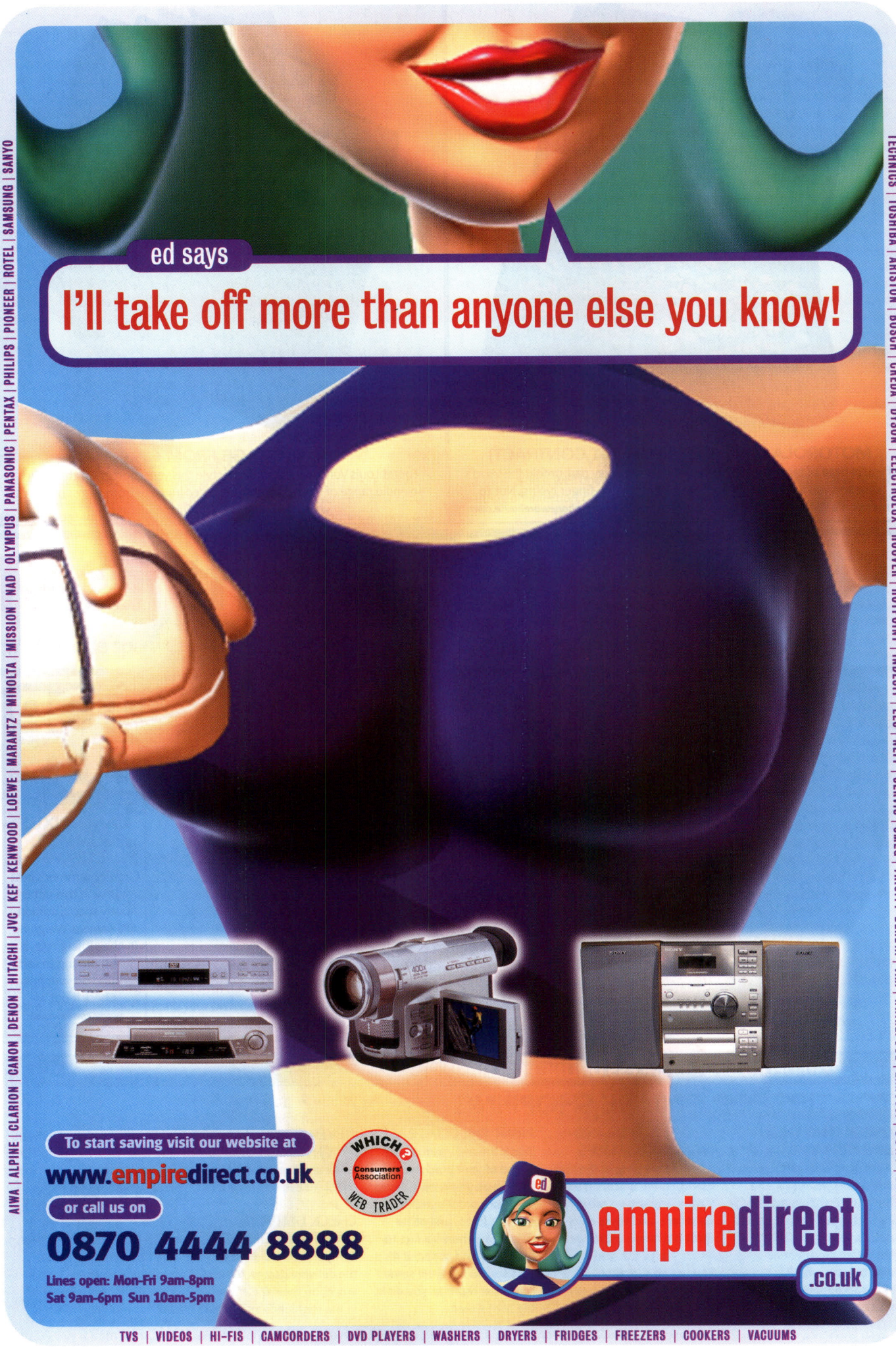
Apple computers are great multimedia machines, but as with any standard home computer, the sound through the supplied speakers leaves a lot to be desired. Not a problem when all you needed them for was games, but with the shift towards true multimedia with CD, TV and DVD capability, we now want better sound. While this amazing-looking iSub isn't going to turn your iMac into a top hi-fi, it will add extra weight to the lower end of the sound, and make for a much fuller-sounding computer. ***www.apple.com/uk***

LABTEC EDGE 418 £80

Flat panel speakers are rapidly becoming the thing to have, especially with the technology sounding better by the month. These chic speakers come with three mounting options, but you won't save that much space by using them on your desktop, as their base has a similar footprint to standard PC speakers. Flat panel speakers are notoriously bass-light, so the Edge set comes complete with a reasonably powerful sub-woofer to fill in the low notes. Suitable for both PC and Mac users. ***www.labtec.com***

ALTEC LANSING ATP3 £69.95

Altec Lansing produces an impressive range of PC speakers, from simple stereo pairs to THX-certified surround sound packages. But out of the whole range, the ATP3 is the most stylish: comprising a large sub-woofer and a pair of thin satellite speakers, it combines good looks with space-saving functionality, as its footprint is very small. The sound is bigger than you'd expect and the satellites give a good account of themselves with the majority of Net-based music, including MP3 files. ***www/euro-tech.co.uk***


ed says
I'll take off more than anyone else you know!
AIWA | ALPINE | CLARION | CANON | DENON | HITACHI | JVC | KEF | KENWOOD | LOEWE | MARANTZ | MINOLTA | MISSION | NAD | OLYMPUS | PANASONIC | PENTAX | PHILIPS | PIONEER | ROTEL | SAMSUNG | SANYO
TECHNICS | TOSHIBA | ARISTON | BOSCH | CREDA | DYSON | ELECTROLUX | HOOVER | HOTPOINT | INDESIT | LEC | NEFF | SERVIS | SMEG | TRICITY-BENDIX | VAX | WHIRLPOOL | ZANUSSI | SONY | SHARP
To start saving visit our website at
www.empiredirect.co.uk
or call us on
0870 4444 8888
Lines open: Mon-Fri 9am-8pm
Sat 9am-6pm Sun 10am-5pm
WHICH? Consumers Association WEB TRADER
empiredirect .co.uk
TVS | VIDEOS | HI-FIS | CAMCORDERS | DVD PLAYERS | WASHERS | DRYERS | FRIDGES | FREEZERS | COOKERS | VACUUMS

WHAT WEBSITE?

The Best of the Web

@ CHANNELS://

> MUSIC 64
The addresses you need to listen to your favourite radio stations online

> MOVIES 68
As *Hannibal* hits the screens, enjoy some of the scariest film sites ever

> SPORT 72
With the Six Nations round the corner, bone up on rugby online

> TELEVISION 75
Use the small box to find out what's on the (slightly larger) box

> TRAVEL 78
Budget? Check. Family? Check. Destination? Look no further...

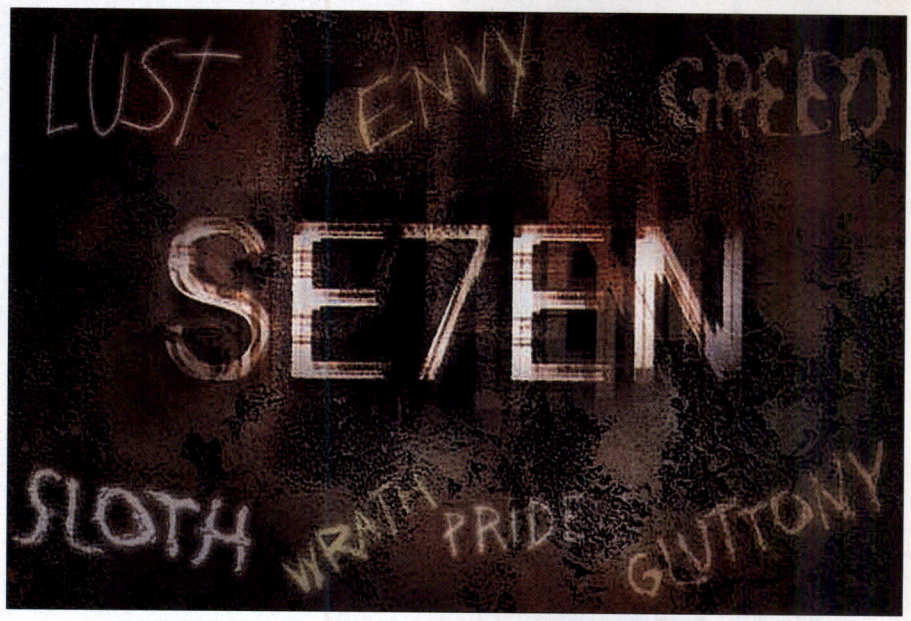
> HOMES 82
Our man with the mouse finds himself a new house online

> MONEY 85
How to get an art classic for a quid (well, almost) on the Web

> LEARNING 88
Give your kids an online leg-up with the best homework helpers

> HEALTH 90
Try something a little different with alternative medicine deliveries

> THE DIRECTORY 94
Essential URLs listed by category



MOVIES Be afraid... be very afraid, with the best of psychological horror sites

SPORT Log on for the Six Nations

ART Own an online masterpiece

FOCUS:// Radio stations

Let's stay in and watch the radio

With radio stations turning on to the Net, we round up the biggest and best

Mark and Lard: great faces for the radio

@ If you have to bookmark one...

BBC ONLINE – RADIO

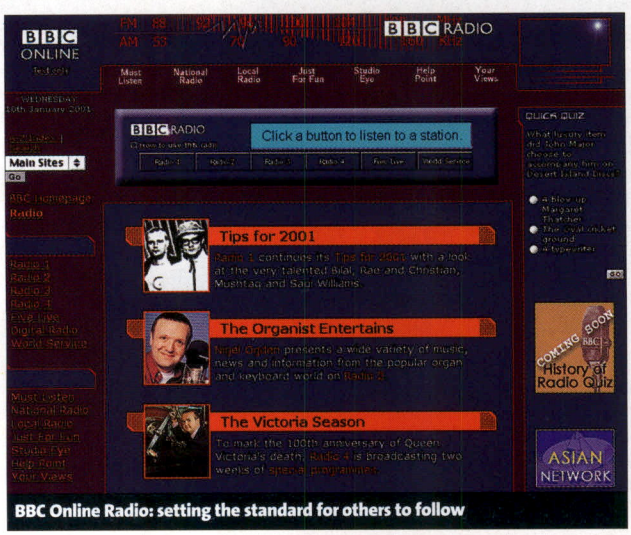
www.bbc.co.uk/radio ★★★★★

When it comes to supplementing broadcast material with Web presence, it's impossible not to hold up the good old BBC as a paragon of excellence. For now, it could be argued that the BBC's Radio site does this even better than its TV or news sections because the surfer can listen to audio streaming of Radios 1 to 5 or the World Service live while perusing this treasure trove of a Web site.

Take a virtual tour of the Radio 1 studios (you'll need Ipix, available through the site, for 360 degree views), see who's in them with the studio Webcams and DJ info, or check what platters they're spinning with the Playlist section (which you can influence by voting online). And that's before you get into the specialist dance, alternative and urban music sections.

Things are naturally more sedate on other channels, but Radio 2 fans can get their fill of Wogan, Ken Bruce, Steve Wright and the rest through Webcams and features, while Radio 3 buffs can send each other e-postcards.

The Radio 4 section is as considered as you'd expect, with solid articles exploring the latest talking points, plus extensive microsites for favourites like *Woman's Hour*, *Today*, *Home Truths* and (of course) *The Archers*. The 5 Live section reflects that station's twin concerns of news and sport, while the World Service site brings you the latest from around the globe. There is even coverage for the BBC's extensive local radio network. We could happily have spent all month looking around this excellent site, but instead, it's over to you...



BBC Online Radio: setting the standard for others to follow

VIRGIN RADIO

www.virginradio.co.uk ★★★★★

Virgin Radio came out of nowhere to become one of the world's most popular Internet stations, thanks largely to heavy promotion and a fervent US fanbase. Around 200,000 use and listen to the site each month. So what is Virgin Radio doing right?

For a start, the site content goes beyond the usual collection of news, studio tours, competitions and freebies. When we logged on, Virgin was streaming a 20-minute interview with The Bluetones and there were photos galore of Chris Evans and his new love, Billie Piper.

But where Virgin has really pushed the envelope is channel provision. By the time you read this, you may be able to stream as many as four alternative channels: Classic (60s to 80s), Lite (pop), Modern (new rock and pop) and Wheels of Steel (disco and 80s rock). By establishing cunning variants on a winning formula, Virgin is sure to strengthen its Web presence.

CAPITAL ONLINE

www.capitalfm.com ★★★★★

One of London's most popular radio stations, Capital FM pulls in the listeners with its mix of latest hits and classic tunes. Thanks to the wonders of streaming, it's now also available for your aural pleasure on the Internet – and it's making a strong fist of it.

A smart, well-organised site, Capital Online hits all the right buttons. Surfers can express their opinions with online votes or visit the online chatroom. Capital also allows users to influence the playlist by voting for their favourite tracks. And there's nothing wrong with giving people what they want.

In common with Virgin, Capital is strengthening its hand by opening Net-only channels to cater for more closely-defined audiences. As *the net* went to press we were yet to see the fruits of this labour, but we had learned that one of the new stations was codenamed Diva. Watch this space.

XFM

www.xfm.co.uk ★★★★★

Although now in bed with the Capital group – a fact borne out by the site's thematic similarity to Capital Online – Xfm retains a fiercely independent viewpoint and fanbase. Regular bidders for a national licence and a favourite among alternative bands (indie godheads even gathered to record a

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON AND JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: BBC RADIO PUBLICITY, RETNA

fundraising album), Xfm currently broadcasts solely in the London region, but the wonders of the Web bring its streaming audio to a worldwide audience.

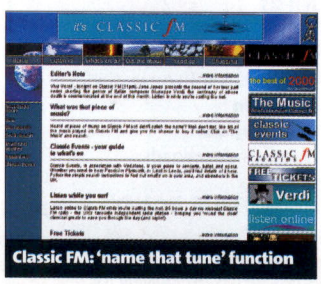
The news is well presented and, when we called in, the station's recommended releases could be had for a reasonable £9.99, along with DVDs and games. There are dozens of reviews ranging from gigs to games and regular online votes for the likes of Album of the Year. Factor in the gig listings, letters, chat room and Web-based email that can be picked up as voice messages, and it's the one-stop alternative music Web site.

CLASSIC FM

www.classicfm.com ★★★★

When a nationwide independent FM radio licence was awarded to a classical station, there were some murmurings that it wasn't what was needed to extend musical choice, given the existence of Radio 3. But Classic FM has done very nicely thank you and has extended its operations to the Web in an unfussy, uncluttered manner, with the odd bright idea along the way.

There's a search engine which allows you to hunt down tunes you've heard on Classic FM – very necessary with classical pieces, as you feel silly asking for 'the one that goes diddly-DEE diddle DEE!'. There's a guide to live concerts in your area, or you can just stay in and watch the opera Webcasts.



Classic FM: 'name that tune' function

Trivia fans will love the Musical Anecdotes section, while those who like to exercise the old grey matter should check out the quiz. And they can get together on the discussion group and argue about Schubert and Schoenberg until the cows come home.

ATLANTIC 252

www.atlantic252.com ★★★★★

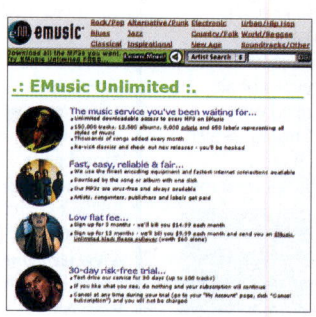
The fast-moving 252 site plays an assortment of Top 40 tunes. It's designed in an Ibiza-club-massive style and laid out like a club. So you can chat in the toilets and pocket some money in the cloakroom (no, really), or go to the DJ booth to email a request and message. Or send a friend an e-card featuring a man's nipples covered in plasters, »

LINKS ;-) LEGAL MP3 DOWNLOADS

Sorry – the free ride's over

George Clinton: available online. Plant pot optional

How many illegal activities have you participated in? As a decent, law-abiding citizen, you'll probably answer none – bar maybe that packet of sweets that 'dropped' into your pocket when you were 15. Otherwise, you're squeaky clean. Yet over the past 12 months, if the figures are to be believed, quite a few of you have been hiding a dark secret. Because we know that in the wee small hours, in the guarded privacy of your own homes, you've been flouting the law with gay abandon.



You're guilty if you've 'swapped' music files with other Napster users around the globe. More specifically, you're guilty if you've exchanged works of signed, major artists. Now while we'll acknowledge the appeal of free music on tap 24 hours a day, we'd also wager that part of the appeal was the illegality of the whole business; you knew it was wrong, and that just sprinkled fairy dust on the thrill of the whole sordid business.

Now, of course, Napster is hurtling headlong toward legitimacy, complete with a deal with BMG (one of the world's biggest record labels). And sure as eggs comes from chickens, the rest of the corporate music biz is rushing to set up deals that secure revenue from downloaded music.

Most significant of the recent deals is emusic's contract with the National Music Publishers' Association. The company's subscription service has been running since July, where users pay $9.99 a month (that's if you sign up for 12 months – it's $14.99 if you only sign for three) for the ability to download as much music as you like. But the NMPA deal offers emusic flexibility that others will envy. As an emusic spokesman explains, 'you'll be able to listen to anything you see on the site, in any order.'

In fact, the consensus is that the free ride is well and truly over. After a year in which any nod at free music exchange was met with a army of cold-faced music industry lawyers, the fervent activity is now directed at pay-as-you-go models for buying sounds. Even MP3.com has unveiled a roster of technologies aimed at linking retailer and consumer in one seamless operation.

For just $9.99 a month, you can grab as much music as you like

Our prediction? In short order, the wired music world will be whittled down to a few major operators, all with massive music industry deals. The global jukebox will become a reality – only this time, the theme park will charge for a subscription admission fee, after which you can jump on as many rides as you like. As for the gangsters of cyberspace, they'll survive – there is simply too much musical contraband sat on too many hard drives to put paid to their dodgy exploits once and for all. Just pray that you're not one of the victims of the upcoming show trials...

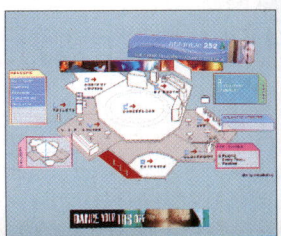
FOCUS:// Radio Stations <cont>

assuming you know somebody who might actually like such an item.

GALAXY FM

www.galaxyfm.co.uk ★★★★★

Despite the rather duff name, Galaxy FM serves a grand purpose by offering dance and R&B tracks to a population of 14 million people across 10 major UK cities. You can choose to plump for the city nearest to you, but the individual station sites are actually quite similar. You do get the odd regional news story with a nice local picture behind the words, although the playlist remains much the same from territory to territory. There are travel offers, brought to you through the joy of site partnerships and there's lots of news and interviews to read while you listen to the latest bangin' choons.



Atlantic 252: includes a toilet

JAZZ FM

www.jazzfm.com ★★★★

Thanks to a revival of lounge-lizard cool, jazz is creeping back into the popular consciousness. And with more than a million listeners tuning in to both its radio and Web stations, JazzFM is determined to keep it there.

The site may lack the pizzazz of the BBC's Web pages, but what you get instead is an easy-surf mix of DJ profiles, reviews, shopping and gig listings.

Best of all, you can download JazzFM's radio broadcast onto your computer, so long as you have a Media Player installed. The weekly *Dinner Jazz* slot could prove to be the perfect accompaniment to any meal, while Tony Blackburn's *Big Soul Night* will spice up even the worst Saturday evening. Nice.

HEART FM

www.heartfm.co.uk ★★★★

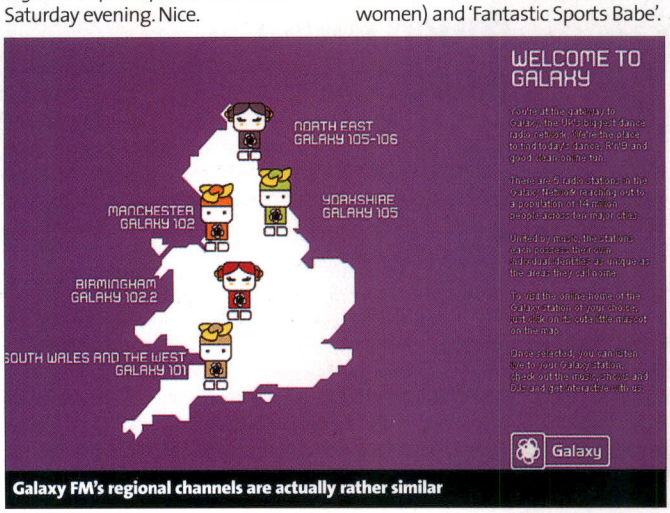
Peddling MOR to the populations of Britain's two biggest cities and linking in with VH-1 has established Heart FM's as the safe channel you don't get noise on, while DJs like Kid Jensen have soothed listeners through the day. You can get cute,if simplistic, weather maps of London or Birmingham and there's a handy database of local events, Heart being a longstanding backer of local charity bashes. Tickets are available for gigs and you can choose to buy any of the Queen or Curtis Stigers songs you're listening to online.

TALKSPORT

www.talksport.co.uk ★★★★

Since former *Sun* supremo Kelvin Mackenzie took over the ailing Talk Radio, he's focused it on sport. This has meant engaging in pitched battles with BBC Radio Five Live for high-profile sporting events and recruiting big-name experts (Geoff Boycott, Peter Shilton, Brian Moore, Chris Cowdrey) while retaining some of the better talk hosts (Tommy Boyd, James Whale, Ian Collins) for those few hours of the day which don't feature sport.

The jam-packed, somewhat gaudy site backs up the sporting ethos. Dozens of top sports stories, supplied by Sportinglife.com, make the site a respectable destination for sports fans, but more importantly the station's output is Webcast through the site. You can even browse the Audio Archive for recent sporting action. However, not all sports fans will be thrilled with touches like 'Candid Camera' (which features little besides buxom women) and 'Fantastic Sports Babe'.



Galaxy FM's regional channels are actually rather similar

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

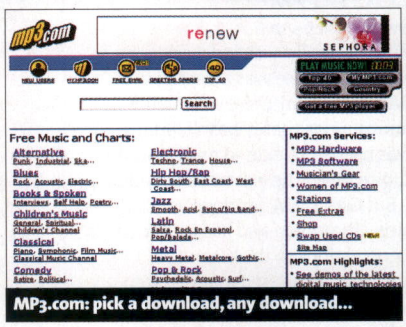
Wall of Sound: US-based music site with features on artists past and present

BAND SITES

UBL.com
www.ubl.com
Go here first for the huge search engine.

Bigmouth
www.bigmouth.co.uk
UK-specific site with tons of links.

Wall of Sound
wallofsound.go.com
Links and features from the US.



MP3.com: pick a download, any download...

NEWS AND REVIEWS

RollingStone.com
www.rollingstone.com
The US publication features extra online content.

NME.com
www.nme.com
NME's online version has a reputation for breaking news.

Spin
www.spin.com/V2/home/index.html
Online version of the edgy US music mag.

GIGS AND TOURS

Ticketlinks
www.ticketlinks.com
Full database of musical events.

Aloud.com
www.aloud.com
Brilliant search engine for gigs.

SceneOne
www.sceneone.co.uk
Easy-to-use guide.

Way Ahead
www.wayahead.com
Competitively priced tickets.

BUYING CDS

secondsounds.com
www.secondsounds.com
Used CDs, actually, but the prices are unbeatable.

Audiostreet
www.audiostreet.co.uk
Easy-to-use, with free postage.

Play247
www.play247.com
Cheap chart CDs.

recordstore.co.uk
www.recordstore.co.uk
'*The* home of dance music retail on the Net'.

MP3s

CMJ
www.cmj.com/mp3
MP3 portal, with newsy bits.

MP3.com
www.mp3.com
Heaps of downloads.

POST YOUR BAND'S MP3s

iCrunch
www.crunch.co.uk
Signs artists exclusively for the site.

peoplesound.com
www.peoplesound.com
A popular unsigned band portal.

Clickmusic
www.clickmusic.co.uk
Excellent MP3 portal.

NEWSGROUP

alt.radio.broadcasting
Talk about your favourite stations.

MAILING LIST

Anyone who's interested in ham or amateur radio can join a discussion group by sending an email marked 'info ham-stuff' to ***majordomo@world.std.com***.

NEED MORE? **Useful music addresses** The Directory p94
MP3 debate Where the artists stand p50

Next time you're hanging around between meetings, check out what a Palm Powered™ handheld can do for you. Take the Palm™ Vx, IIIc or m100 handhelds for example. With the optional Mobile Internet Kit you can send and receive e-mails or SMS, or use the Web Clipping Applications to access the best of the net from virtually anywhere*. And we mean anywhere. With a Palm Powered handheld and the Mobile Internet Kit, you just take the Internet with you – it's that simple.

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FOCUS:// Psychological horror

He's behind you...

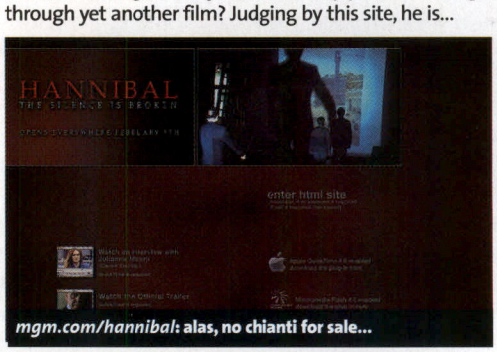
Hannibal Lecter's back, so we salute psychological horror sites on the Web

'Looks harmless enough...'

TV spots and additional QuickTime footage is reported to be coming soon, although no date has been posted.

The text portion of the site is a good read, too: Unit Publicist Rob Harris' journal covering the *Hannibal* set will make you think twice of ever joining a production crew. And the 'have you seen him?' opportunity to snap a picture of Lecter and post it online blurs the line between fantasy and reality.

Get involved by offering your suggestions on improving the site; aside from getting your name added to the contributors' list, the Webmasters seem pretty keen to satisfy visitors' requests. There's now talk of a fourth cinematic outing for Mr Lecter – in the form of author Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*. But is *Hannibal* enough of a sly nutter to keep punters on edge through yet another film? Judging by this site, he is...



mgm.com/hannibal: alas, no chianti for sale...

@ If you have to bookmark one...

HANNIBAL

www.mgm.com/hannibal ★★★★★

Probably one of the most eagerly awaited sequels in recent years, Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* is sure to cause a ruckus at the cinemas when it's released on 9 February. The production was troubled – both director Jonathan *Silence of the Lambs* Demme and Jodie Foster refused to be involved with the sequel. However, the official site is a positive sign of things to come. It's haunting and moody, with Anthony Hopkins' quiet murmurings ('Is this Clarice?') inviting you to get involved in an interactive taster of what can be expected on the big screen. You'll need QuickTime and Flash to get the full flavour of the site, which offers video interviews with the stars of the film, trailers, screensavers, wallpapers and photo galleries.

MANHUNTER

www.manhunter.net ★★★★

Before *Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* found their way on to celluloid, director Michael Mann was bringing Lecter's psychotic shenanigans to the big screen with *Manhunter*. Based on Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, there's a definite unease to be felt in Brian Cox's portrayal of the cold-blooded serial killer. Webmaster John Mounsey's thorough site gets few points for design, but his enthusiasm comes across in a series of cast profiles, reviews, shopping options and galleries. Moving around the site is no problem: the homepage will lead you wherever you want to go in a

manhunter.net: great wallpaper

lick. Links can also be found in the text (the Hannibal Lecter page, for example, links back to articles on Thomas Harris, *Silence of the Lambs* and a series of e-cards). A link to Black Star (***www.blackstar.co.uk***) allows you to buy DVDs and videos from the Lecter series, while Mounsey's own film memorabilia can be found at eBay (***www.ebay.co.uk***). Respect, too, for a great series of wallpapers and icons.

ERASERHEAD

members.nbci.com/Ray_Wolfe/index.html ★★★★

David Lynch's seminal, freak-out horror-drama is the poster child for art cinema. A cryptic plot centred on fear of responsibility, a nerve-grating soundtrack and visuals that will wake you up in the night gel together to make an unforgettable piece of film. Sites for *Eraserhead* are few – no wonder, seeing as the type of job it'd call for. Ray Wolfe's *Online Guide to Eraserhead* is a commendable effort, however, and attempts to break down the film scene by scene. Divided into six chapters, Wolfe tries explaining the 'hidden meaning' behind the action. This may prove confusing to Lynch virgins: 'God puts forgiveness to work and Henry's sin is cast away (into the mudhole)...'. Unfortunately, a portion of the site is still under construction, but promises online DVD shopping, a guest book and news page. A haunting screensaver is yours by logging on to Wolfe's page at ***members.aol.com/raywolf1/eraserhead/screen/screen.html***.

PSYCHO... CHECK RIGHT IN!

users.netreach.net/treyl/psycho.htm ★★★★★

Hitchcock's wildly celebrated horror flick may have only cost about $900,000 to make, but has raked in over $40million since its release in 1960. Gus *Good Will Hunting* Van Sant's misunderstood scene-for-scene remake in 1998 just goes to prove the powerful effect a mad-man can have on a viewers' psyche. Psycho... Check Right In! may not bode well at first glance. One of those annoying trailing cursors makes moving around the home-page an irritating affair – but, once into the site (the trailing cursor thankfully disappears after the homepage), a wealth of info and downloads await the eager fan.

The plot is explained in a dissertational print-and-photo essay, while a link to the Webmaster's thorough Hitchcock site provides a complete account of the director's work. There's also some great *Psycho* stills to peruse and a sturdy catalogue of soundbites (including our favourite Norman line, 'We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?'). Some interesting notes about the novel that inspired *Psycho* and trivia that would make the IMDB (***www.imdb.co.uk***) proud rounds off this satisfying fan site. Flash-addicts, meanwhile, may get a bigger kick out of Universal's official site for Van Sant's remake, at ***www.psychomovie.com***. Here you can send a nifty Bates Motel ecard to your fellow horror fiends, choose from two striking screensavers and enjoy something ominously called The Subconscious (a series of moving stills overlapped with dialogue from the film). There's also background on the actors and an explanation as to why on earth Gus decided to fix something that wasn't broken.

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: KOBAL

THE HELLBOUND WEB

www.rexer.com/hell ★★★★

Clive Barker's 1987 horror piece *Hellraiser* has more psychological ties than the casual viewer may give it credit for. Marital breakdown, adultery, a Cinderella versus evil stepmum scenario, an Electra complex and a large dose of sadomasochism boil alongside Cenobites and general oozing nastiness. Fans wanting to track down Pinhead et al on the Web needn't look any further than Tripps' The Hellbound Web, which is currently experiencing a bit of upheaval. The old URL above is no longer being updated, but is a must-visit. There's an exhaustive encyclopaedia covering all five *Hellraiser* episodes, complete with photos and soundbites. Don't let the few broken links put you off; all is promised to be well in a few months time, when the updated URL, at ***www.cenobite.com***, is finished. A handy info page will keep you notified of the changes.

In the meantime, the latter URL features image, audio and PC-friendly movie galleries; a chance to show your *Hellraiser*-inspired art to other fans and a shop. Patient surfers will surely be rewarded when Webmaster Tripps finishes tying up the loose ends. The award-winning *Hellraiser: The Suffering* (***www.fortunecity.com/victorian/hill-crest/76/hellraiser***) is more of the same, but with the extra bonus of a Metastream Puzzle Box for PC users to play with.

KUBRICK-WEB: THE SHINING

www.kubrick-web.co.uk/shining.htm ★★★★

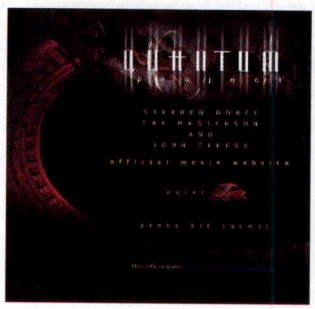
Because Stanley Kubrick's psychological horror trip spawned a few corny catchphrases (all together now – 'Heeere's Johnny!'), it's easy to forget what a thrilling, albeit draining, viewing experience it is. Web sites dedicated to the film are hard to come by, with many now inactive. For the dedicated fan, however, kubrick-web (***www.kubrick-web.co.uk***) provides the last bastion of decent commentary on the late »

LINKS ;-) ONLINE MOVIES

One Quantum leap too far

Until you look for it...it doesn't exist,' read the promotional material for the summer's much-heralded pioneering Web movie, *The Quantum Project*. As it turned out, the line couldn't have been more apt.

Proudly trumpeted as the first ever full-budget Net film, complete with Hollywood-sized budget and production values, *The Quantum Project* was a world away from the grainy, amateurish efforts that had previously passed for cyber-movies. Starring John Cleese, Fay Masterson and Stephen Dorff, the love-meets-physics flick garnered headlines and plaudits for its ambitious online-only distribution deal.



Eight months on, however, the question remains: was anyone actually watching? Hosting company sightsound.com has been reticent over traffic figures and downloads for the official site (***www.quantumproject.com***). Suspicion remains that Hollywood's current flirtation with the Web is little more than a publicity-grabbing short-term infatuation rather than a substantial relationship.

The Quantum Project, while ambitious, was dogged by a number of flaws. Even with a super-quick Web connection, the film proved too heavily pixellated to enjoy at full-screen size. Critics were less than impressed by the over-reliance on special effects at the expense of plot, and a $6 download fee for 32 minutes doesn't make financial sense given the cheaper alternative of renting a full-length video.

Sightsound remain undeterred. They've signed a deal to distribute 12 Miramax-backed films over the Web – and once they've reached the end of their downloadable shelf life, they can be sold as videos (online, of course). But this is unlikely to have movie execs quaking in their boots – film lies way behind music, gaming and even TV in online potential.

Nibblebox.com is a case in point: when launched it was heralded as a unique opportunity for up-and-coming amateurs to make Net-friendly mini-movies. In reality, the vast majority of Nibblebox's hits have been animations, a trend repeated across the Web – cartoons are cheaper and more cyber-friendly than films. And with the online audience more likely to be entertained by short, cheap laughs rather than highbrow flicks, who wants the next *American Beauty* to appear on your desktop first?

The Quantum Project was a world away from previous cyber movies

It's not all bleak, however. Cyberspace is filled with overambitious film portals and producers talking excitedly of increases in bandwidth and new software to help them achieve their ambitions. Among the filmmakers lies a pool of genuine talent hoping to succeed outside the mainstream – and if *The Quantum Project* proves one thing, it's that getting a (half) decent finished product online is a lot easier and, potentially, a lot more rewarding than seeing your name in lights at your local multiplex.

fantastic games

100% FREE

freeloader.com

FOCUS:// Psychological horror <cont>

filmmaker and his work. *The Shining* page, at ***www.kubrick-web.co.uk/shining.htm,*** provides an overview of the plot and cast, a few high-quality stills and three great sound clips – one of which (Midnight, the Stars and You) provides fans with the echoing 20s tune that so enraptured a possessed Jack Torrance (Nicholson). You can also pick up the novel, VHS tape or DVD through a link to Amazon. The content may not be extensive, but what is present is solid, valuable surf time. One warning – the pages can be very slow to download.

***rexer.com*: a must-visit**

SE7EN

www.se7enmovie.com ★★★★

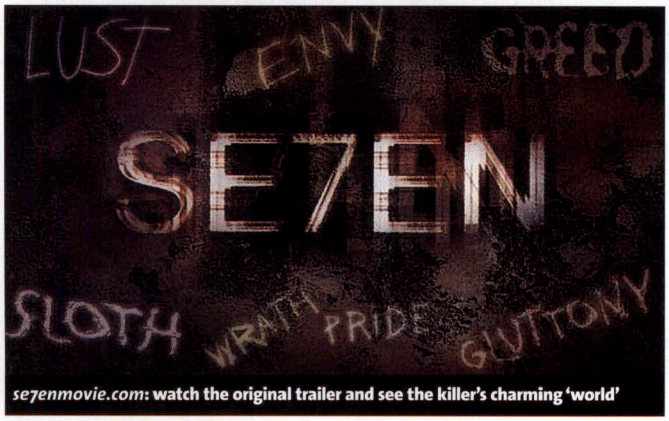
David *Fight Club* Fincher's grisly drama avoids the usual cop-buddies-tracking-loony-killer machinations thanks to some carefully drawn characters and a troubling portrayal of a modern-day hell on earth. New Line's official site had been designed to promote the release of the DVD last December, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Allowing the still-DVDless of us to enjoy some of the perks not available on VHS, the Preview Disc One page provides video clips of the film, with the director and actors talking about their time on set.

There are also some interesting soundbites to be found, with film theorist Richard Dyer discussing the importance of sound and lighting in *Se7en*. Preview Disc Two provides images from scenes which never made it to final cut (the DVD, meanwhile, provides the cut scenes in full, with Fincher's commentary). There's also a chance to watch the original trailer and take a peek at the film's killer's 'world'. Finally, a link to Email Shows, Inc. (***www.email-shows.com***) allows you to join forces with other subscribers in an interactive bid to catch *Se7en* psycho, John Doe.

ALIEN

www.alien4.com ★★★★★

This 'old dark house' thriller set in outer space taps into fears regarding the female reproductive system. Or so they say. One thing's for sure – sexual stereotypes were turned upside down as Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) took hold of a typically male/hero role, and 'Mother', the computer system meant to keep Ripley's crew safe, betrayed them. Fox Film's official site (***www.alien4.com***), although designed to promote *Alien Resurrection*, the fourth instalment, provides a unique chance to engage in Web role-playing. You'll need Shockwave and QuickTime to get the full gist of the proceedings, but it's worth every second of download time. The Alien Digizine pages provide trailers for the *Alien* series, an opportunity to buy merchandise, a screensaver and a nail-biting 3D game. The Alien Resurrection Experience, meanwhile, offers the chance to join the crew, albeit with an Alien foetus in your tummy, and find a way to kill the creeps. Find out about the different species of Aliens, get information from crew, survey the tools you have to protect yourself and make an attempt to escape – all via various stills, text and video clips. Ask 'Father' (Resurrection's version of *Alien*'s 'Mother') for help, but expect cryptic Ask Jeeves-style replies. Fantastic, time-consuming and somewhat perplexing for Alien beginners.



***se7enmovie.com*: watch the original trailer and see the killer's charming 'world'**

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

***Popcorn.co.uk*: provides news, reviews, shopping and the chance to watch trailers**

MOVIE NEWS AND RELEASE DATES

Popcorn.co.uk
www.popcorn.co.uk
A British slant on releases.

Aint It Cool News
aint-it-cool-news.com
For the inside track on what's new on screen.

Film Unlimited
www.filmunlimited.co.uk
Views from *The Guardian*.

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
uk.imdb.com
The bible of online film.

MOVIE REVIEWS

Cinemachine
cinemachine.com
Retrieve film reviews from across the Web.

Filmreview.co.uk
www.filmreview.co.uk
A UK-based review site to rival the Americans.

Movie Review Query Engine
www.mrqe.com
Features 19,000+ films.

The Trailer Park
www.movie-trailers.com
New trailers.

OFFICIAL FILM SITE RESOURCES

Fox Movies
www.foxmovies.com
Links to 20th Century Fox releases.

Warner Bros Online
www.movies.warnerbros.com
WB's new films and lost classics.

Disney Movies
www.disney.co.uk/DisneyMovies
All the kids' faves in one.

AMATEUR AND SHORT FILM WEB SITES

SightSound.com
www.sightsound.com
The place to see *The Quantum Project* (see Links, page 69), as well as other film shorts.

in-movies
www.in-movies.com
Budding filmmakers may submit scripts here.

AtomFilms
www.atomfilms.com
Offers new filmmakers a chance to sell their wares.

MOVIE THEATRE DIRECTORIES

Odeon
www.odeon.co.uk
To book online, or peruse the very latest information.

Virgin Net – Movies
www.virgin.net/movies
Takes the hassle out of organising a trip to the cinema.

Cineworld – Multiplex Cinema
www.cineworld.co.uk
UK film portal that also includes a cinema finder.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

Horror Films
alt.horror
Get spooked with other fans.

MAILING LIST

Join a horror discussion group by sending an email marked 'info horror' to ***listserv@listserv.indiana.edu***.

CHAT ROOM

www.film-philosophy.com
Read and discuss film articles here.

NEED MORE? **More movie addresses** The Directory p94
Multimedia tech tips Advice Centre p115

FOCUS:// Rugby Union

Scrum puts kick into Six Nations

With *the* tournament starting soon, we've eked out the best rugby sites

PLANET RUGBY

www.planet-rugby.com ★★★★★

For quality of news and columnists (England captain Martin Johnson, former Springbok coach Nick Mallett and Wallaby great Michael Lynagh), there's little to choose between Planet Rugby and its main rival, Scrum.com. In fact, when it comes to international news, Planet Rugby has its rival beaten – especially with its international match archive dating back to 1871.

However, the site fails to match Scrum for coverage of domestic league competition, hence its runner-up status. What the site does offer is some fine screensavers and wallpapers and a class resource called MatchMaker, which allows clubs to fill gaps in their fixture lists by arranging matches through the site. And there's a nice slice of humour provided by the Lookalikes section, which has translated successfully from other 365 sites (Planet Rugby is part of the successful 365 stable of Web sites) – had you ever thought of comparing Leicester and England prop Darren Garforth and Baron Silas Greenback of *Dangermouse* fame?

WORLD OF RUGBY

www.worldofrugby.com ★★★★

World Of Rugby lifts the load from your overworked search engine by collating the best news from sources such as Sky, the BBC and online newspapers. Alongside that you'll find other rugby-related sites sorted into regional interest sections, coverage for purely international news, and sections for referees, Sevens and even shopping. And in the interests of equality, they've also included a gateway for women's rugby sites – so you can forget the hooker jokes.

However, World of Rugby has three offshoot sites dedicated to the Six Nations Championship, the Tri-Nations series and the Super 12 tournament, all of which provide a fine service for the rugby surfer. They've even fixed it so that you don't have to visit the site, as they'll email regular news updates to your inbox.

RUGBY HEAVEN

www.rugbyheaven.com.au ★★★★

Calling yourself Rugby Heaven could be asking for trouble, but this site is far from hellish. In fact, you'll find cherry-picked stories from four major newspapers: Britain's *Electronic Telegraph*, Australia's *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The New Zealand Herald* and South Africa's *Independent Online*. The result is news and features of high quality from across the oval-ball globe.

Not one to over-elaborate, Rugby Heaven concentrates on this strength; the only other really useful parts of the site are a fixtures calendar and a rules and laws section. However, Rugby Heaven does take its audio and video abilities seriously and is beginning to offer live audio coverage of major international matches. Leaving aside the tricky issue of broadcasting rights, it can't be long before sites such as Rugby Heaven allow sports fans to view matches on their desktop rather than having to go down the pub to watch. Er, hang on a minute...

Rugby Heaven: four papers, one site

RUGBY LEGENDS

www.rugbylegends.com ★★★

The jury is still out on Rugby Legends (the legends in question being former players of high regard such as Grant Fox, Naas Botha, Ollie Campbell and JPR Williams, who make occasional contributions to the site). Despite its list of supporting rugby luminaries, Rugby Legend's news coverage falls behind the likes of Scrum.com and Planet Rugby. However, the addition of a Rugby Channel section that promises live audio coverage of matches bodes well for the future. The video section already has a tidy archive of Super 12 and World Cup highlights, plus interviews with players and coaches in both Windows Media and Real Player formats.

But Rugby Legends' real ace is the 'community' it is developing by offering free site hosting to clubs and schools. There appears to be plenty of takers, and this should continue to attract non-techie schools and clubs on a budget.

RUGBYRAMA

www.rugbyrama.com ★★★★

Just in case any of you Francophiles out there were feeling left out, there's Rugbyrama from our leetle chums across the Channel. It's smart, fast and informed, just what you'd expect from a site built with a little Gallic flair. And for those who had a limited attention span in French class at school, the site offers the main news in English.

Alongside the news and chat, Rugbyrama offers a technique section that goes beyond the fitness tips provided by other sites. Within, you'll find everything from advice on the art of scrummaging to the role of the full-back or 'libero', as the wearer of the No 15 shirt is described. Such articles provide an insight into the rugby philosophy that so often has us marvelling at French back play. But best of all is the chance to sign up for

@ If you have to bookmark one...

SCRUM.COM

www.scrum.com ★★★★★

When push comes to shove, Scrum.com sits atop the rugby union Web site pile by virtue of doing the simple things well – and doing plenty of them. The sheer depth of coverage is hard to beat, with current news updated regularly throughout the day. Although the bias tends to be on the English game, whether it be the Zurich Premiership or international news there's still enough for Celts and southern hemisphere folk to enjoy.

And if you're anxious to track down a nugget of information, then Scrum.com comes into its own: two drop-down menus will take you to news, results, fixtures and tables sorted either by nationality or by competition. The searchable archive has two years' worth of stories, although it can be tricky to find a specific article.

Regular columnists contributing to the site include the BBC's John Inverdale, John Taylor from ITV, and current top players such as England's Lawrence Dallaglio and the Springbok captain Andre Vos. In these days of professionalism, the site doesn't forsake the amateur side of the game and there's a bulletin board, chat facility, fans' forum and social calendar (rugby speak for the bit that comes before and after matches, usually involving beer).

Those just getting into the sport will find a dictionary of rugby terms and rules, while the hardcore followers can make use of the fitness section. Armchair fans can tap into the TV guide, while there's a live text commentary facility for selected matches and a 'shopping maul'. Shopping maul. Geddit?

WORDS: BRUCE POPE; PICTURE: EMPICS

Young Johnny Wilkinson: just what South Africa doesn't need this month

Rugbyrama's WAP news service to your mobile phone, allowing you to keep abreast of developments and improve your French at the same time. Vive la difference.

SCARLETS

www.scarlets.co.uk ★★★★

If you're a club looking to launch your own site, study the example set by Welsh club side Llanelli RFC. The Scarlets have had time to get it right, as evidenced by the archive stretching back five seasons.

This easy-to-navigate site makes good use of multimedia, with regular audio interviews with players and staff, plus a wallpaper selection to give your desktop that authentic Stradey Park atmosphere.

And although there's only a test broadcast today, the Scarlets should soon have schedules for its own streaming radio stations. Net beginners get a useful guide to the MP3 software needed to enjoy broadcasts (with a downloadable version of WinAmp lite), plus two Scarlets skins to customise WinAmp once you've downloaded it.

FINE DISREGARD

www.finedisregard.com ★★★★★

Undoubtedly the finest of the Rivals.net rugby union site network (yes, even better than the Victor Ubogu site), Fine Disregard has irreverence and humour in spades. There's also a large helping of strange and bizarre stories from the rugby world, one such being the tale of the mysterious death of a seagull with an attraction to rugby posts(?). No punches are pulled, and readers are encouraged to contribute if an article catches the eye. This makes for some lively banter that will have you quietly chortling. If you want a site that plumbs the depths of rugby's darkest crevices and rubs deep heat in them for a laugh, then this is one site you can't afford to ignore.

RUGBY RESOURCE

www.rugbyresource.co.uk ★★★★

There's nothing fancy about Rugby Resource, but it merits a mention simply because the concept is so good. The site is essentially one big lonely-hearts-style introduction agency, putting players and back-room staff together with clubs in need of said individuals. All you do is register your details of what and where you want to play or coach, or what personnel are required by a club, and a bit of electronic match-making goes on. Outside of the moneyed halls of professionalism, playing rugby's always been a labour of love, so Rugby Resource seems appropriate, not to mention useful. 'Broken down lump of lard seeks similar souls for Saturday afternoon buffoonery in the mud...'.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

LATEST NEWS AND SCORES

ESPN.com
espn.go.com
Scores for all sports, with a distinctly American bias.

Sky Sports
www1.sky.com/sports
Forget begrudging the TV subscription fee – this is hot sports news from Sky that comes free of charge.

Soccernet
www.soccernet.com
Score flashes from all UK games (part of the ESPN network).

Sporting Life
www.sporting-life.com
News, scores and betting advice on everything from rugby to the NFL.

ESPN: the latest sports news with a US slant

TOP FOOTBALL SITES

Football365.com
www.football365.com
Humour, news and plenty of features.

FourFourTwo
www.fourfourtwo.com
Top site from Britain's best football magazine.

Teamtalk
www.teamtalk.com
Independent club news service.

Soccer-Links.com
www.soccer-links.com
Links for world sites.

Football365: lives, breathes and eats the stuff

PLACE AN ONLINE BET

Blue Square
www.bluesq.com
Best-known online bookie.

Sporting Index
www.sportingindex.com
The biggest spread-betting site.

Victor Chandler
www.victorchandler.com
User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE

PlanetFootball.com
www.planetfootball.com
Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.

Sport On Air
www.sportonair.com
Host of bang up-to-date streamed broadcasts, covering news from rugby to cricket.

talkSPORT
www.talksport.net
Listen to the radio station's sports coverage as it happens.

TOP SITES FOR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

Atlas F1
www.atlasf1.com
News, articles and chat from the online motoring magazine.

Fishing.co.uk
www.fishing.co.uk
National news, advice and offers.

CricInfo
www-uk.cricket.org
The ultimate ball-on-willow site; news coupled with statistics.

Cycleweb.co.uk
www.cycleweb.co.uk
Up-to-the-minute news and tips for cycling enthusiasts.

NEWSGROUP

rec.sport.rugby.union
The ideal place to find others who share your passion for the oval ball.

MAILING LIST

Meet other rugby fans by sending an email marked 'info rugby' to ***majordomo@elists.com.au***.

CHAT ROOM

Get nattering about sports via *The Sporting News* chat group, at ***www.sportingnews.com/chat***.

NEED MORE? Useful sports addresses The Directory p94

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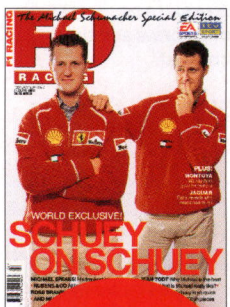

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TN31

FOCUS:// TV Listings

The Royles, post online TV guide examination

What's on the TV?

Planning a night in? Bin the paper and check out these cyber TV listings guides

@ If you have to bookmark one...

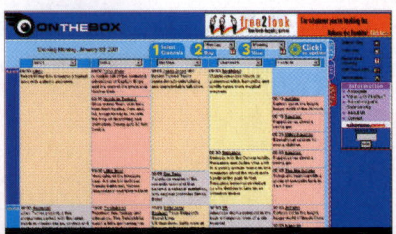
ONTHEBOX.COM

www.onthebox.com ★★★★★

If functionality is the key to a Web site's success, OnTheBox could teach other, more heavily-backed TV listings sites a thing or two. Most people want listings sites to offer a clear design which allows them to view the a handful of the channels of their choice – if this sounds like you, try OnTheBox. Drop-down menus allow you to choose five channels; in a trice you'll get as much info as space will allow on all the programmes, and clicking on the titles will take you to full details including whether it's subtitled, monochrome, widescreen, stereo or a repeat.

If that's not enough to make your remote tremble, there's added useability in that you can choose whether to study the whole day's listings or a 'Slice' (immediate three-hour period) in detail. Moreover, you can define background colours in a variety of categories from science to sports and gardening to Gaelic, so you can programme the background to turn a virulent purple if a category of your choice appears.

The catch? OnTheBox only seems to hold a week's listings – not necessarily a bad thing, but when we tried on a Thursday it was still linking to the previous Monday rather than the next. And small HTML bugs remain unless you're using Explorer on the PC. But overall OnTheBox takes a relatively simple (if not easy) process and make it extremely user-friendly and efficient, as the Web, at its best, always should.



OnTheBox: you choose, it supplies... in seconds

UNMISSABLE TV

www.unmissabletv.com ★★★★★

The publishing company behind Britain's biggest-selling TV magazines (*What's On TV*, *TV Times* and *TV & Satellite Week*) provides a variety of ways to get the telly information you need. There's a host of background info in several sections, from sport to soaps and films to features. There's a Must Watch section with the site's recommendations, forums for voting on TV issues and facts on all your favourite stars. But what of the listings? Again, you can personalise the page with a quick registration – or, if you prefer anonymity, access listings for your area and platform (cable, digital satellite etc) through pull-down menus. Visually it's not the nicest, but the listings are very detailed (full *Coronation Street* cast details, for example) and offer links to other sites. And you can use the pull-down menus for very detailed searches, be it aerobics in Anglia or comedy in Carlton. And like one or two other sites, you can see five channels at once if you're in the mood for a bit of choice.

TVGUIDE.CO.UK

www.tvguide.co.uk ★★★★

If you manage not to baulk at the sight of this site, you might find it a useful one-stop shop. All channels are on the same screen, but genres are independently coloured (which is a sight to behold). So if you fancy a bit of comedy, cast your eyes down the channels and look for the cerise boxes – or, alternatively, specify your genre with the pull-down menu. However, the same usability doesn't prevail with the channel selector: we tried several times on different browsers and platforms to reduce the choice from 120-plus, but were still inundated with surplus Sky movie channels.

There's no real depth of data, though; clicking on the titles brings up a promising-looking pop-up browser, but it only offers the transmission time and a chance to 'click here for cool stuff' from Amazon.

UK TV GUIDE

www.uk-tv-guide.com ★★★★

The UK TV Guide is powered by DigiGuide, a longstanding *the net* favourite which, once downloaded, sits on your desktop and tells you what's on the box for the next fortnight. This is the online version, and it brings you many of the same benefits. A clean, easily-navigated layout brings you information on just about every programme on hundreds of channels, from Bloomberg to the beeb.

A quick registration lets you whittle down the channels to the selection available on your telly, then choose from the channel list on the left and you've got every programme that day. Sadly, there's no facility for checking more than one channel at once – which would be useful if you've got the plethora of channels that digital affords – but you can customise the channel choice; and the programme search facility is useful, turning up lots of information on new series, links and similar shows.

RADIO TIMES

www.radiotimes.co.uk ★★★★★

The grand old dame of TV listings has grasped the (Inter)nettle with a gusto typical of the BBC's Web presence. Tellingly, as soon as you leave the front page you swap over to the beeb.com domain – home of the hard sell, where the Corporation is allowed to sidestep the public-service issue and flog you books, vids and whatever spin-offs it can.

But we're here for the listings, and quite impressive they are: a detailed user-defined channel guide will bring you the information you need. It would be better »

Radio Times: grand dame does good

Irritated by irrelevant answers when you search?

Ask! SM

For relevant answers to your question just type it in at www.ask.co.uk

Ask Jeeves SM

www.ask.co.uk

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Cable Guide: register, and it'll even remember your favourite five channels.

served by employing pop-up windows for programme details than clicking through – you'll soon tire of hitting the back button – but it picks up marks for having schedule updates on the front page in case you'd planned your evening around a new episode of *Xena*, only to find it's been replaced by one you've already seen. It's also the only online guide we found to include VideoPlus codes. And unlike most other listings sites, it has details on radio programmes – well, it *is* the *Radio Times*...

CABLE GUIDE

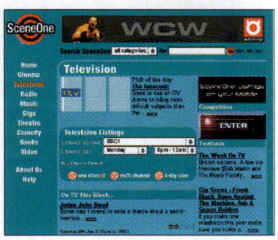
www.cableguide.co.uk

★★★★★

The meaty monthly magazine doled out free to cable subscribers has a strong if slightly bland Web presence. As in the mag, the handful of feature articles on the site are mere window-dressing for the *raison d'être* – relatively detailed listings for a month's worth of cable telly, along with the big five terrestrial channels.

Personalisation (which involves a 60-second registration process) means the site will remember the favourite five channels you nominate for speedy front-page access to listings for programmes on right now. An excellent feature is the ability to search for your favourite programmes and add them to a TV Diary so you never miss those must-sees, whichever channel they might be on.

You can even set up email reminders to alert you to the upcoming episode of *Emmerdale* you couldn't possibly miss. And there's a reasonable choice of views: check a single channel in detail (over one day or the next three) or see five at once.



You can set up email reminders or add faves to a TV diary

SCENEONE UK TV GUIDE

www.sceneone.co.uk/s1/tv ★★★★

Entertainment listings service SceneOne is a place to surf to when you want to get out tonight but aren't sure what for – a film, a gig, or the theatre. But when inertia strikes, check what's on the telly with SceneOne's TV guide. The balance on the TV section's front page is nearly perfect, with listings instantly accessible but backed with other features (Pick of the Day and show previews).

But the beauty is in the listings engine, which gives you a choice of channel, day and six-hour timespan and promptly displays enough programme details for you to decide what's worth watching. The four-day view, alternatively, gives you the listings for the next four evenings (or mornings, afternoons or nights).

Like some other listings sites, SceneOne gives you the choice of viewing five channels at once; however, unlike most of its rivals offering this option, you only choose one and the site auto-selects the other four. These tend to be four of the terrestrials, unless you've gone for an easy category like films (choose Sky Premier and you'll get all its little digital cousins).

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURE: BBC

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

GUIDES FOR POPULAR SHOWS

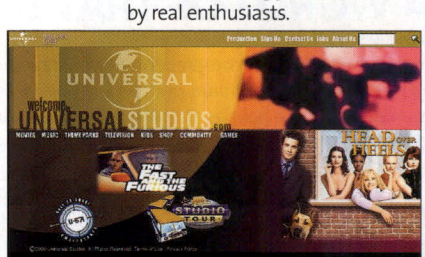
Cold Feet
www.coldfeetonline.co.uk
Ground-breaking site dedicated to ITV's comedy-drama *Cold Feet*.

EastEnders
www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders
Features a Walford Webcam and clips from old episodes.

Friends
www.warnerbros.com/pages/friendstv/home.jsp
The gang's official site.

Corrie.net
www.corrie.net
Get all the latest gossip before it hits the Street with this *Coronation Street* fan site.

The Royle Family
come.to/theroylefamily
Episode guide, cast lists, quotes and sounds.



Universal Studios: online store is a collector's dream

BUYING TV MEMORABILIA

TVToys.com
www.tvtoys.com
Pick up TV toys, books and the like.

Universal Studios
www.universal-studios.net
$450 Woody Woodpecker painting, anyone?

The Propstore of London
www.propstore.co.uk
Amazing collection in the shop.

Noveltytogs.com
www.noveltytogs.com
A great source for *South Park* and *Simpsons* stuff in pounds sterling.

TV ONLINE

VirtueTV.com
www.virtuetv.co.uk
Music, film, sport and lifestyle programmes at a click of the mouse.

Yahoo! Events
www.broadcast.com
Live events.

Live Internet TV Broadcasts
www.livetv.wwitv.com
Hook up with 100+ global live TV stations.

TV NEWS AND INFO

TV Cream
tv.cream.org
Old shows lovingly revisited by real enthusiasts.

Bigglethwaite.com
www.bigglethwaite.com
TV fan site for British viewers.

UltimateTV
www.ultimatetv.com
As above, but US-biased.

NEWSGROUP

TV – is it the drug of the nation? Discuss at ***rec.arts.tv***.

MAILING LIST

Join a TV studies discussion group by sending an email marked 'info Screen-L' to ***listserv@uanvm.ua.edu***.

CHAT ROOM

Chat to *Coronation Street* fans at ***www.stormloader.com/coronation***.

TV Cream: a brilliantly-researched stroll down memory lane for telly addicts

NEED MORE? Useful TV addresses The Directory p94

FOCUS:// Holiday searches

'Barbados for a fiver, please'

Not sure where to go on hols? We review the sites that'll tell you where to go

@ If you have to bookmark one...

A WORLD OF TRAVEL

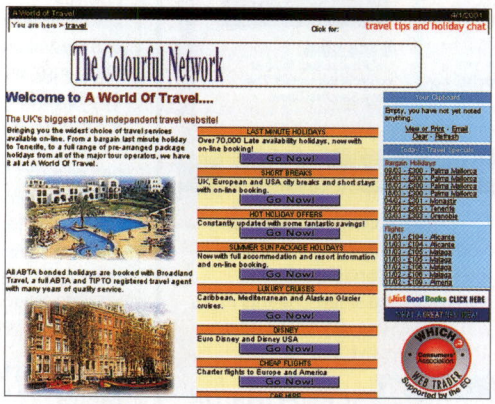
www.worldof.net/travel ★★★★★

To merely call this site comprehensive would be to do it a gross disservice. It contains pretty much everything you need to plan a holiday at home or overseas, from global car hire to a quick currency converter which is updated no less than three times a day.

Webcams in 16 countries let you see how your chosen destination looks at any given hour of the day, including views of Sydney Harbour, Hawaii's Sunset Beach and, er, Broadgate, Coventry (we were wondering, too).

You can search for holidays in the sun by both destination and budget, and will be rewarded with a list of all suitable accommodation, complete with photo and star rating. There's a brief but informative description of the holiday, plus a list of key facilities and approximate price details, though you do have to phone to find out the full price and check availability. You can, however, make your actual booking online.

Lovers of luxury will appreciate the Power Search which lets you specify criteria from sea view and restaurant, to Jacuzzi and video games. There are quick and power searches for late deals; we were offered two



nights at a two-star hotel in Paris for £99. Another search facility lets you research, say, sport, education and religion in your country of choice. Different sections of the site offer luxury cruises, hot offers, cheap flights and various package deals. When we visited, a ski and snowboard section was still under development.

Easy to navigate, informative and user-friendly, A World Of Travel should be the first stop for anyone planning their hols or a short break. For those on the move, there's even a WAP version at *mobile.worldof.net*.

LASTMINUTE.COM

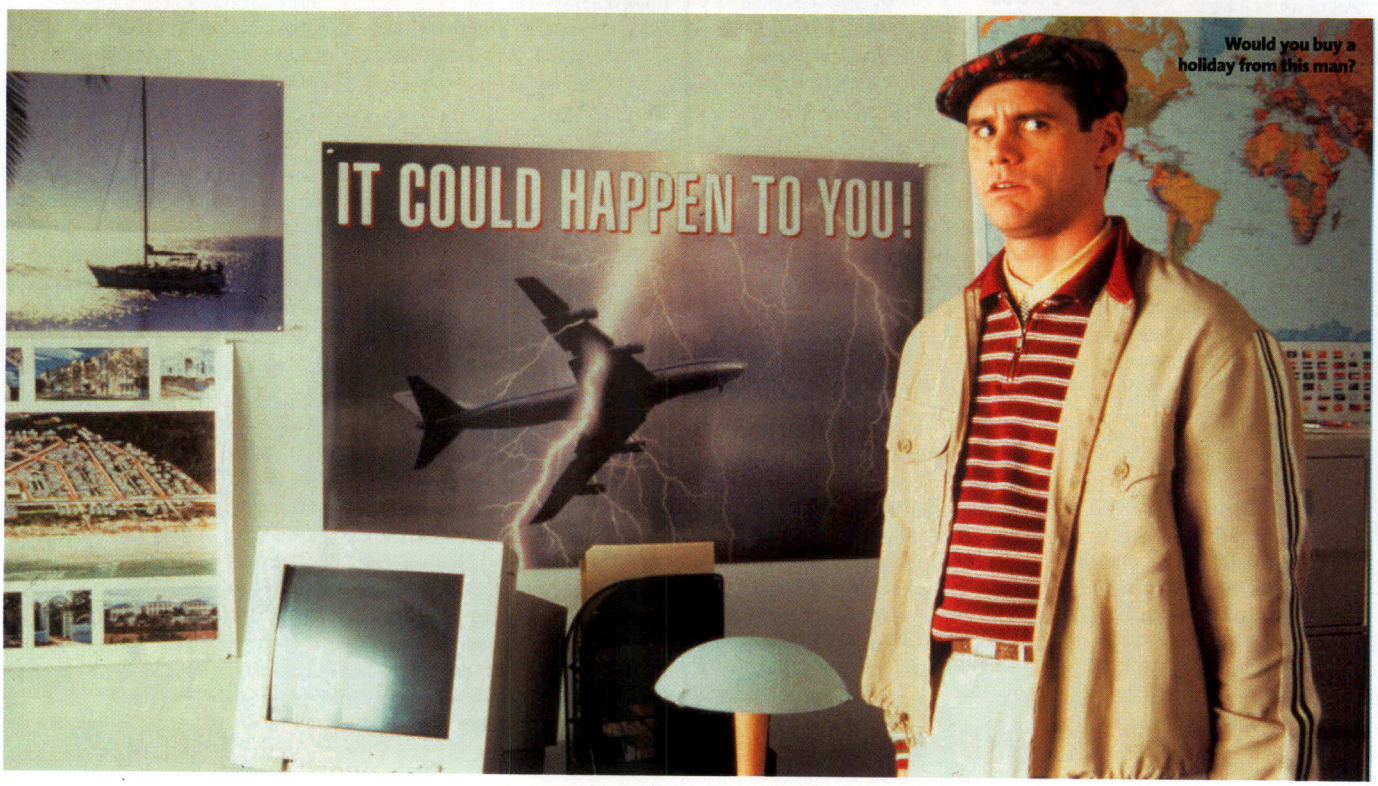
www.lastminute.com ★★★★★

If you're looking for a holiday at the last minute, chances are you'll be able to make only the very simplest of decisions, such as whether you fancy a suntan or skis. The holiday section of this well-known site sympathetically provides this option and speeds things up with a questionnaire which allows you to respond with an urgent 'I don't mind!'. But if it's merely 11th-hour rather than last-minute, you can specify destination, departure date, budget and accommodation. Once you've found something that fits the bill, you can quickly read the description of your destination, accommodation and travel, give the useful smattering of Fast Facts a once-over, check availability and book online. The easy navigation, simple search criteria and texts mean you won't get stressed out by the process of booking your break.

BARGAIN HOLIDAYS

www.Bargainholidays.com ★★★★

You'll need to know your geography if you're looking for a sun holiday on Bargain Holidays' cheap 'n' cheerful site. The destinations are listed alphabetically by town only (no indication of country), though you can opt to search by price range or departure date. For general holiday searches, however, you can click on a map of the world to check out the options. The results of your search are given in a simple table which is fine if you're not too fussy about details. Handy links to holidays



Last Minute: quick and easy

costing less than £199 and flights for under £99 are great for those on a budget. Weather reports, currency converter, and destination and resort guides complete the picture.

LUNN POLY

www.lunnpoly.com ★★★★

If the default destinations of Majorca, Menorca and Ibiza aren't your bag, there are hundreds of international options on Lunn Poly's sunburn-coloured site. The clear layout and simple questionnaire make it easy to find a break in the sun or snow, or grab a late deal, although you'll need to be patient with the slow connections and the trawl through several pages to find the exact package you want.

The accommodation search criteria are disappointingly scant but the results provide reassuringly detailed information. If your first search doesn't get you anywhere, the site will suggest alternatives. The resort guide includes photos as well as the option to download 360-degree views.

THOMAS COOK

www.thomascook.co.uk ★★★

This neatly-designed and easily-navigable site offering sun, snow and last-minute holidays includes plenty of valuable information about resorts and accommodation, including good-sized photos.

The range of destinations on offer for sun holidays, though, is surprisingly pedestrian for a major travel agent: mainly the Caribbean and the Mediterranean plus a sprinkling of other standard locations; Morocco, Finland and Brazil weren't available, for example. And while the snow holiday section provides reviews of resorts (plus news, top skiing tips, snow reports and reviews of ski gear), there is no equivalent for sun holidays.

So wait and see which resorts it throws up for your choice of region, then read the blurb to find the one that sounds right for you.

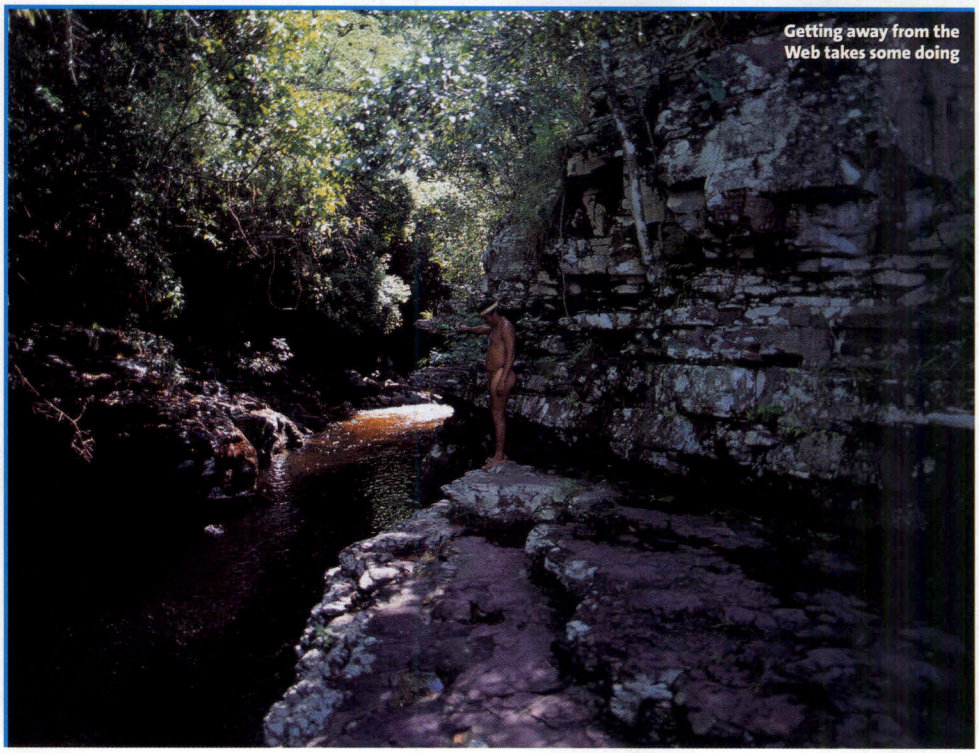
TRAVELCHOICE

www.travelchoice.com ★★★

If you're planning a break on a tight schedule, you'll find it useful being able to see flight times of the deals on offer at Travelchoice. Search results come up quickly and are based on the most basic criteria, »

LINKS ;-) INTERNET PLANET

The Web: not World Wide


Getting away from the Web takes some doing

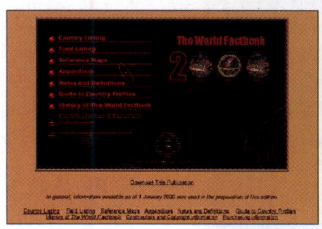
While we all embrace the new global economy we hear being trumpeted on every available occasion, it's nice to be able to get back to nature once in a while. Just as management companies make a mint from bussing stressed-out executives into the middle of nowhere to build rafts out of sticks, so those who spend hours hooked up to the so-called Information Superhighway yearn for the thrill of the open road.

Unfortunately, as we're always being told, the Web is all around us. Check into a remote hotel and you can order email with your room service. Wander through ancient ruins and you're never more than one wrong turn from another cybercafé. There's no escaping the Internet – or is there?

Though the Web's tentacles spread far and wide, there are far-flung corners of resistance to electronic globalisation. The CIA, among others, has recently begun chronicling the Net's reach; and its findings offer hope for the techno-saturated in need of a break (***www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook***).

Take Tonga, for instance. On paper, it has a higher concentration of Web addresses than any other African nation – but almost none of them are located there, as their owners are simply chasing the coveted .to domain name allowed by registration there. In fact, you've got more chance of bumping into a penguin in Tonga than you have of getting online.

The world hasn't logged on as one. Finland and New Zealand boast ISPs galore, with the latter boasting one host for every 20 members of the population; Iran has only one for over 65 million people, with Net access being frowned upon by the country's religious leaders. In Bhutan, which borders India and China, television has only recently been legalised, and the Western influences of the wired world are discouraged. The poverty-stricken African nation Eritrea doesn't have a single ISP, and its only pages are hosted from Ethiopia or further afield.

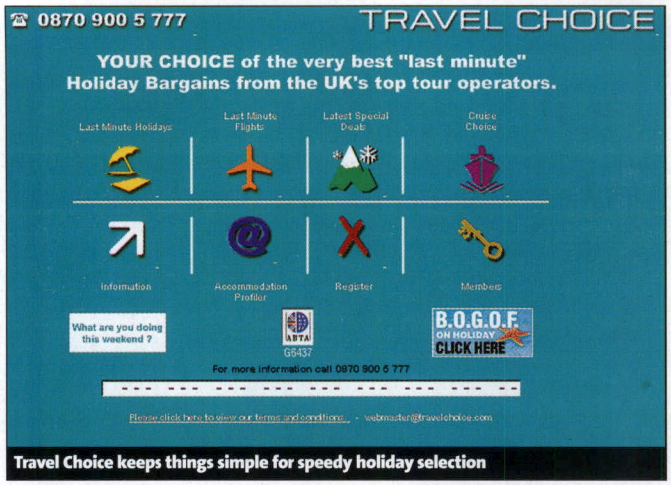


Religious Iran has one ISP for 65 million people

The problem lies in the availability of telephone lines in the developing world; while the Web was sold as a great leveller in the global economy, in reality the difficulties of installing phone connections in countries where the demand is low outweighs the benefits. TV is a far cheaper medium and is far more widespread where phone services are erratic.

There is hope for the Web, though, and it lies, rather ironically, with television. With Web TV rapidly catching up on its PC-based companion, numerous manufacturers are making advances into the Far East in particular. Their ploy is simple: offer Web TV sets at discounted rates, or even for free, then sit back and watch the cash roll in as consumers splash out. Unfortunately, this new Web world comes at a price; the 'Web' available through TV will be shrunk to just a few commerce sites and portals, which does little to encourage newcomers to create sites or explore the Internet's minutiae. Still, it's a start – and it means escaping the Web will become even more difficult...

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY; ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: KOBAL, CORBIS



Travel Choice keeps things simple for speedy holiday selection

although you can choose up to three destinations and three airports to broaden your search.

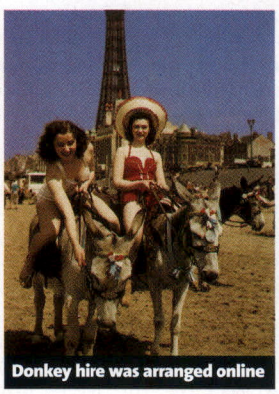
In keeping with this minimalist approach you only get the most basic details in your results. It's frustrating not to get any advice on how to modify your search criteria, and unhelpful to have to stipulate your holiday choice by country of destination only to have the results given by town alone. Still, there's a good range of breaks on offer: as well as your usual sun and sand deals there are sections on sailing, cruises and skiing. You have to e-mail or phone to book, though.

EDREAMS

www.eDreams.com

★★★★

'We love holidays because the best ones create rich memories that last all your life'. So goes eDreams' slightly cheesy philosophy, though it seems fair enough when you peruse its offerings, which are in a notably classier league than your usual high-street package.


Donkey hire was arranged online

It's easy to jump between the truly global destinations and holiday categories including Active Journeys, Cultural, Relax, and Beaches and Sun. With the emphasis on finding the right type of holiday, rather than when and where, you don't get to fiddle with specifications like choice of departure date, airport, budget, etc.

Once you've found something that fits the bill, you have to phone eDreams to check on availability and make your booking. If you have any specific questions to ask about your chosen region or category, you can e-mail your query to eDream's extensive panel of Dream Guides. There is also a small selection of last minute deals.

ONLINETRAVEL COMPANY.COM

www.otcuk.com/home/home.asp

★★★★

This glossy, highly informative site offers plenty of photos, features and suggestions, plus a decent range of holiday types, including UK breaks and wedding trips as well as the usual sun and sea stuff. A list of destinations would be useful, but a little trial and error quickly brings up a list of holidays to match your requirements, and a neat summary of the resort and accommodation, flights and prices.

The rest of the search criteria are kept to the basics, which is useful if you don't have time to fill out a more detailed questionnaire. You can have your results sorted in order of destination, price or departure date, and if the package you want isn't available, the site offers alternatives: we were offered breaks in Tunisia or Egypt when Morocco was off the menu. Oh, and you can either book online or by telephone.

DREAMTICKET.COM

www.dreamticket.com ★★★★

The extensive, detailed and highly readable lowdowns of each resort here are all the more useful for their impartiality. You could be grateful, for example, to be warned in advance that the water at the Turkish seaside resort of Side 'is never more than adequate' or that Costa Calma in the Canaries suffers from 'something of a soulless atmosphere'. Unfortunately, the search criteria don't include budget. The simple layout and step-by-step texts make it a doddle to find a sun holiday to suit your needs, even if you haven't got time to read through all the blurb.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

TOP ONLINE FLIGHT DEALS

A2bTravel.com
www.a2btravel.com
'Britain's biggest online travel information and booking resource' has flights leaving from across the UK and Ireland.

MyOwnPrice.com
www.myownprice.com
This site asks how much you're prepared to pay and then tries to match it.

Deck Chair
www.deckchair.com
Comprehensive flight-finders for worldwide destinations.

DESTINATION INFO

Virgin Net Travel – City Guides
www.virgin.net/travel/cityguides
Provides all the information you'll need for a short break.

Rough Guides
www.roughguides.com
From the publishers of the well-established guide-books.

Lonely Planet Online
www.lonelyplanet.com
Let the travel experts guide you around your destination.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Tips 4 Trips
www.tips4trips.com
1,000 handy 'tips for trips'.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office – Travel Advice
www.fco.gov.uk/travel
Get info on countries before setting off.

The Travel News Organisation
www.travel-news.org
Good source of independent news for travellers.

eTravel.org
www.etravel.org
Travel mag, with plenty of tips.

ACCOMMODATION

Places To Stay
www.placestostay.com
This site will find you a suitable place to rest up.

CottageNet Vacation Rentals
www.cottage-net.ndirect.co.uk
Self-catering database for the UK and Ireland.

Smooth Hound Systems
www.smoothhound.co.uk
Cheap UK B&Bs and hotels.

DAYS OUT IN BRITAIN

LondonTown.com
www.LondonTown.com/index2.html
Things to do in the Big Smoke.

Britain Express
www.britainexpress.com
Travel and heritage guide.

NEWSGROUP

alt.travel
Discuss anything and everything to do with holidays here.

CHAT ROOM

If your break didn't live up to expectations, vent your spleen at ***HolidayComplaint.com***.

Places To Stay: somewhere to kip

Virgin Net Travel – City Guides: enjoy a long weekender with Virgin's help

NEED MORE? Useful travel addresses The Directory p94

New...

The No.1 Property Search Engine.

Search through 498,674 properties from every major property site with the...

SMART ENGINE!

COMPLETE HOUSE BUYER.CO.UK

www.CompleteHouseBuyer.co.uk

Powered by **SMART ENGINE TECHNOLOGY**

FOCUS:// Property finders

Exasperated by London prices, house hunters soon turned elsewhere

Peep through your next keyhole

House hunters can minimise moving stress by finding their next abode online

RIGHTMOVE.CO.UK

www.rightmove.co.uk ★★★★

When all was said and done, this survey of property finders really came down to a straight fight between rightmove and asserta home. That the decision on an overall winner was so close is a reflection of rightmove's strength. It shares many of asserta's qualities: the search is simple, and the results are many and well-presented. You get a decent picture of most of the properties, and just the right amount of background to help make an informed decision. There's even a 'personal file' facility similar to asserta's. In fact, rightmove's only mistake was not to travel the extra mile: for many, the in-depth area background detail offered by asserta will be invaluable in deciding upon a new home, and rightmove is not as comprehensive. That said, it does have genuinely useful snippets that asserta lacks, such as a glossary of terms you're likely to encounter in the vicious, baffling world of moving home. And the facility that'll help find a solicitor or surveyor is undoubtedly useful. A great site that's well worth a visit – but we wish they'd gone one stage further.

08004HOMES.COM

www.08004homes.com ★★★

At last: a property search that works the way you do. For most of us, the difference between spending £150,000 and £160,000 is an issue – yet many searches offer price gradations of up to £50,000 (a reflection of the site designer's salary, perhaps?). 0800, however, offers £20,000 leaps, enabling you to fine-tune your search. That's not to say that all's well with 0800. As requested, we inputted our sample postcode – only to be told that there were no properties matching our criteria. Which either means that 0800's database is lacking, or that something catastrophic happened in Surrey that afternoon. And the frustration didn't end there. The site tempts with an 'Area Guide', complete with backgrounds on local schools and even shopping advice. Problem is, the Surrey cupboard was bare (that said, they clearly exist within the site – and they're useful enough, even including such snippets as season rail ticket prices). If you're an ONdigital subscriber, you'll also be able to make use of 0800's services – the site is an official supplier to ONnet.

HOMEPAGES

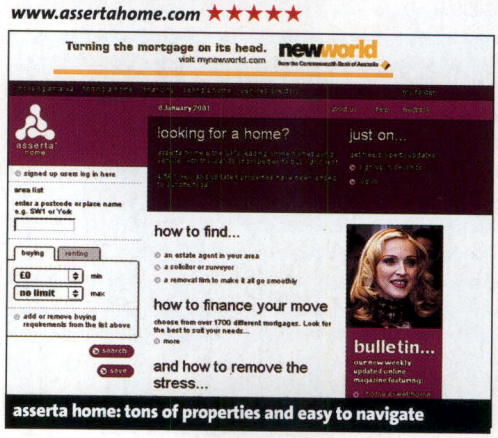
www.homepages.co.uk ★★★★

No endless clicking with Homepages: the search is presented upfront, asking location, price and number of beds required – simple, no-nonsense stuff. And, lo and behold, our Surrey search produced a good range of accurate results (10 matches, with prices up to £269,000). As you'd expect from a site within the excellent MoneyExtra empire, there's a promising depth of support information, including a Moving Checklist and Market News (although when we checked the latter, it was two months out of date). Most powerful of the lot is perhaps the Mortgage Finder, where the Money Extra database can be searched and instant quotes provided. There's also an email alert service to warn when new properties are added that meet your criteria – and it can also be set up to SMS your phone. Another nice touch is the at-a-glance map showing where the site's claimed 57,000

@ If you have to bookmark one...

ASSERTA HOME

www.assertahome.com ★★★★★



asserta home: tons of properties and easy to navigate

Of all the property sites we scoured during our survey, asserta home performed best. Why? Because it has tons of properties. Because the search is quick and well prioritised. And because whatever questions you have, asserta will most likely have the answer.

Faults? Yes, it has some. The home page, for example, could do a better job of explaining why you need to register, and of telling you how to access the advanced search section. But once you have registered (it only takes seconds), the site does a formidable job.

Our Surrey search produced a host of results. And once we found our three-bed heaven, we could then get information on local schools, rail links, a map of the area – even the local MP (his name, that is... not a map).

If you need the finance, the site will search through 1,700 mortgage brokers for you, and there's even a monthly payment ready-reckoner that gives figures for both Interest Only and Repayment.

But perhaps the most seductive feature for the house hunter is the 'save' facility; once you've registered, you have a folder into which you can pop your favourites.

WORDS: MARK PAYTON; PICTURES: TONY STONE

properties are distributed, with ratings of either 'excellent', 'good' or 'thin' – so saving you the effort of fruitless searches.

FIND A PROPERTY

www.findaproperty.co.uk ★★★★

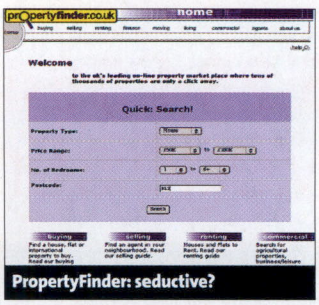
Although it may not be a truly national house hunter (most of the properties centred around London and the south east), Find a Property shows many of its rivals the way to go. Rummaging through the 19,000-odd abodes is easy thanks to the sympathetic search engine (just one click away from the home page); and our Surrey hunt produced superb results – accurate, quick to download and well presented (20 houses are shown per page). You're then linked through to the local estate agents' pages, where you can complete your details and register your interest. There's nothing fancy about the site, but what there is sharply edited and lively – from funny snippets to detailed market analysis. And that's without mentioning the site's real sucker punch – 360 degree 'Virtual Tours' of the homes on offer. Sure, the download may take a minute or two, but you can now look around the rooms, offering a perspective that's unique and powerful.

Look round the home's rooms in a virtual tour

PROPERTYFINDER.CO.UK

www.propertyfinder.co.uk ★★★

On the face of it, PropertyFinder is a fairly seductive proposition – there's an email alert service if you register, it claims to have 'tens of thousands' of properties UK-wide, the search lets you choose a maximum or minimum number of bedrooms, and there are location maps for the properties featured. So it's a shame to find a few flaws that mar the experience. Take the search map, whose rather blunderbuss approach meant that our Surrey search had to request 'Outer London'. And the home page's quick search asks that you hunt by postcode – which is probably fine if you're moving locally, but a pain if your target is 150 miles away. Extras on site include online quotation services for conveyancing, surveys and even removals. The lifestylish 'Living' section, however, is simply a link to PF's partner, Servista.com – which means that you're signing up to their utilities services.



PropertyFinder: seductive?

HOUSEWEB.COM

www.houseweb.co.uk ★★★

Now for a property site with a twist. Whilst its rivals reviewed here accent on the business of buying, HouseWeb actually lets you advertise your country pile for all the world to see. This potentially means cutting the estate agent from the mix – which many would argue need not be a bad thing. And, luckily, the site includes a fairly extensive advice section to help you slice through the legal mire, while the detail given for each property is impressive (actual room measurements, etc). A great concept then – just a shame that the execution couldn't be improved a notch. The quick search, for example, takes its brief a little too literally. And if you just want to browse through properties, the format makes for leaps of faith in getting to the area you want.

UK PROPERTY GOLD

www.ukpg.co.uk ★★★

How much do the brains behind UKPG think British people earn? We only ask, because the site's price search features one of the most extraordinary leaps we found during this survey. From £100,000 to £200,000, you make £50,000 jumps – and after that, you hurtle upward by hops of £100,000. In fairness to UKPG, however, it does return a good range of properties (over 40,000 overall), all cleanly presented and aided by such useful snippets as local services and schools data. Once you have found a house in which you're interested, you're driven into the estate agent's site. And like so many of the house hunters, they'll email you to warn when a suitable property becomes available. Still, we can't help but feel that UKPG could do better; too much of the site's message is aimed at advertisers rather than users, and when we visited, the 'mortgages' section was temporarily unavailable.

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

ELECTRIC APPLIANCES

Bes Direct
www.buyelectricaldirect.co.uk
What's a gaff without the right accoutrements? This online supplier of home entertainment and domestic appliances will help your pad buzz – and at discounted prices! Includes free delivery in the mainland.

WINDOW DRESSINGS

Easyblind
www.easyblind.co.uk
Scupper the enjoyment of your nosey neighbours with made-to-measure blinds. Check out the Special Offer section too.

FIXTURES

Jim Lawrence Ironwork
www.jim-lawrence.co.uk
Specialises in curtain poles, door handles, lights, kitchen and bathroom fittings and lamps using traditional blacksmith's skills.

PLUMBING

Plumbworld
www.plumbworld.co.uk
Put an end to leaking faucets and tacky accessories with well-priced plumbing goods. Includes a 60-day money-back guarantee and free shipping for most of the UK.

CLEANING TIPS

How To Clean Anything.com
www.howtocleananything.com
Just in case you make a mess.

REPAIRS

MisterFixit dotcom
www.misterfixit.com
Repair advice for low prices.

How To Clean Anything.com: till it shines

The Natural Handyman
www.naturalhandyman.com
US site with tips and ideas. You can email to ***Subscribe@naturalhandyman.com*** to get on a mailing list offering home help and humour.

GO GREEN

Garden.com
wwwz.garden.com
Log on here to get some clever garden tips.

e-garden
www.e-garden.co.uk
Modern gardening site with a sense of humour in places, plus tips, news and shopping.

CHAT TO OTHERS DIY ENTHUSIASTS

DoItYourself.com
www.doityourself.com
Reckons to be the first and leading Net community offering an ABC of DIY.

Remodel Online
www.remodelonline.com
For an A-to-Z of yankee-doodle-dandy-style home improvements, look no further. It even includes feng shui (still)!

Make your neighbours green with envy with tips gleaned from Garden.com

NEED MORE? **Useful home addresses** The Directory p94
Discount DIY Goods See DealFinder p30

egg: invest

Is your ISA up as much as you'd like?

The Egg Easy Choice ISA could be the perfect antidote to the worry of poor performance. Top brands, top performers, independently selected.

- Choose between UK Growth and Technology markets.
- Each package contains 4 top-ranking funds, chosen using Financial Times Information and MoneyMate Technology.
- Great discounts on initial charges.
- Easy to buy. You don't need to be online to get one of our Easy Choice packages.
- Only £80 needed to start investing.

Avoid disappointment, go for growth.

Give us a ring to **get an information pack** or visit our website.

FT
FINANCIAL TIMES
Information

MoneyMate

Go on, get a pack. **0845 234 5646**

Go on, visit the website. **www.egg.com**

small print

Funds may invest in overseas markets so fluctuations in currency may affect the value of your investment. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to the future. The value of investments and the income from them can fall as well as rise and you may not get back the full amount invested. Current tax levels and relief depend upon your personal situation. Tax and ISA legislation can vary at any time. Calls may be recorded. Egg Invest does not offer a client advisory service. If in doubt about the suitability of an investment please seek advice. Egg is a trading name of the Egg group of companies which are registered in England and Wales. Registered Office: 142 Holborn Bars, London EC1N 2NH. Egg Investments Ltd is regulated by the Personal Investment Authority.

FOCUS:// Speculative art buying

'Warhol for sale, one careful owner'

Investing in art used to be strictly for those already in the know. Not any more...

ARTPRICE.COM

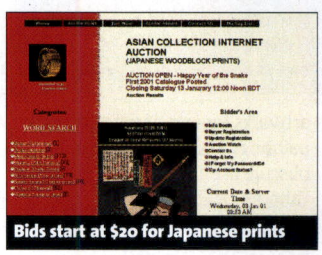
www.artprice.com ★★★★★

This impressive site makes for an excellent introduction to the online art market. With access to more than two million auction outcomes since the year 1700, Artprice certainly provides a comprehensive insight into market behaviour. You can also find out the average price an artist is fetching and compare the fluctuating prices on the works of different artists. This service isn't free, though, with prices ranging from a dollar a search down to 50 cents, depending how much you sign up to buy. What is free is access to all the latest art world news. Artprice.com is a great site for the serious investor, but perhaps a tad rich for the weekend dabbler.

JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINT

www.woodblockprint.com ★★★★

If you're more entrepreneur than connoisseur when it comes to art, perhaps you should think about specialising. There is a range of good single-subject art sites out there, and as items come in and out of fashion, keeping abreast of minority areas may well pay dividends. This site, for instance, specialises in Japanese woodblock prints dating from the early 19th Century up to the middle period of the 20th. The auction process is kept simple, with the option of auto-bidding up to a set price, so you can make your best offer and leave it at that until somebody comes in with a higher bid. The auctions last for two weeks, and 200 prints are on offer at a time. With bids starting at $20 – and with estimated values a lot higher – this could be a great place to start buying.



Bids start at $20 for Japanese prints

SMITH & JONES POTTERY AUCTIONS

www.smithandjonesauctions.com

★★★★

After years of conducting its sales by mail, phone and fax, Smith & Jones recently added an online option. As the company name suggests, Smith and Jones – no relation to the UK comedians or US cowboys – sells pottery. The range of items available is very impressive, from Dorchester plates for a couple of hundred dollars to George Ohr vases for around $3,000.

The next auction runs from March through April, giving you plenty of time to appraise yourself of the lots via the site, and research and consider which items to bid »

@ If you have to bookmark one...

ARTNET.COM

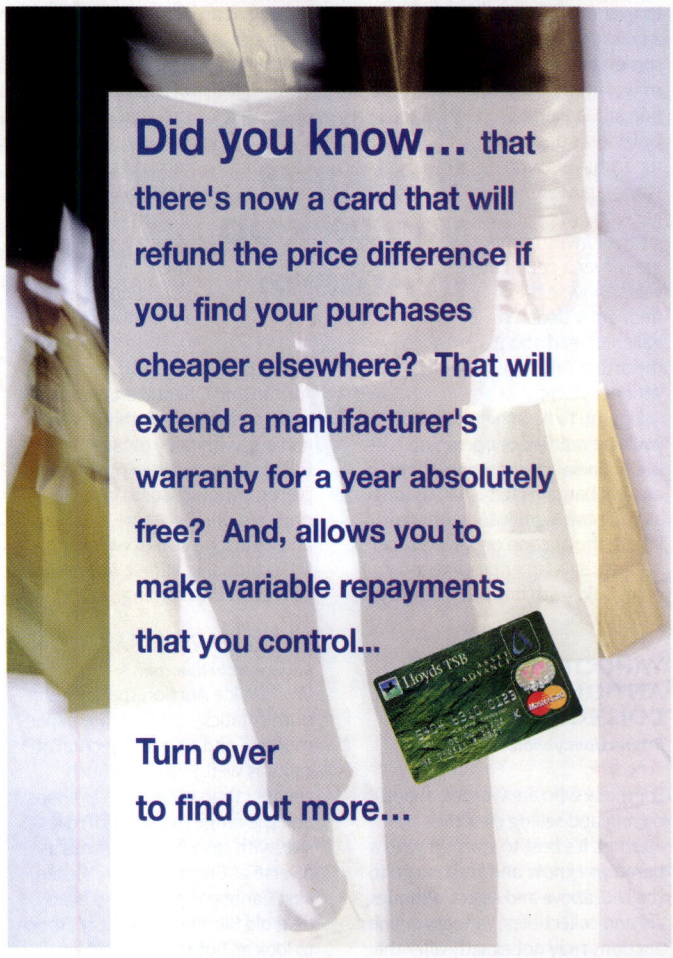
www.artnet.com ★★★★★

Artnet is a well-designed, highly professional site, which – like many of the others here – snubs the 'hands off' approach of the majority of online art auctioneers and instead offers the services of a team of professionals who vet every lot, and oversee the auctions.

The auction section works likes a dream, with plenty of detailed information on the items for sale, including size, estimated value and an enlargeable image. Experts are on hand to answer specific questions.

Artnet also offers an attractive range of fixed-priced prints, allowing you to get a copy of that Warhol you've always wanted without having to go through the stress of a bidding war. These aren't the same as the prints you pick up in Athena, and with prices in the thousands be prepared to stretch your flexible friend.

The range of services is impressive and includes email notification when an artist in whom you are interested comes up for sale at any of 250 auction houses, plus a powerful art search engine. There is also a database of almost two million items sold at auction, although this is a paid-for service. What is free is access to the very informative *Art Net* magazine, with well-written stories covering the world of art and limited but useful access to the Grove Online Dictionary of Art.



They'll let anybody into an auction these days

for. If you're thinking of spending a great deal of time browsing, there is also the option of buying a printed catalogue. Sign up for the mailing list and you need never miss a sale here. You can also sell consignments of pottery on the site, all for very reasonable and negotiable fees.

ST PIERRE GALLERIES

www.stpierregalleries.com ★★★★

If you're in for the long haul rather than simply interested in making a quick buck, then it's somewhat easier to make money out of fine art. St Pierre Galleries is designed for art buyers with staying power, people who are willing to let their investment grow over a period of years. Browse the frequently updated galleries, read about the artists and take your time over your decisions.

Sign up to be a member and you'll be notified of upcoming live online auctions where there are real bargains to be had as long as you have significant sums to invest; the auction on 4 November last year saw an impressive array of art sold, with items fetching up to $50,000.

These aren't the same as the prints you pick up in Athena

YAHOO! AUCTIONS: ANTIQUES, ART & COLLECTIBLES

list.auctions.yahoo.com/uk

★★★★

For those who are worried about buying and selling over the Internet, it's best to start off with a name you know and trust, so go to the URL above and select 'antiques, art and collectibles'. Yahoo!'s online auctions may not exactly offer the most impressive range of past masters, but then not everybody has that kind of money to invest. There is an ever-changing range of artworks for sale here, including paintings, sculptures and more obscure art forms, all presented in Yahoo!'s clear and concise style.

EXTRALOT.COM

www.extralot.com ★★★★

Sprechen sie Deutsch? Well you might need to have a sprinkling of German to get the most out of this site. It does have an English version, but rather annoyingly seems to resort to German whenever you're looking at an item's details. For example, an Andy Warhol screen print of Marilyn Monroe – on offer for a very reasonable 350 Euros (about £250) – is described as 'in gutem Zusand' which we believe to mean 'in good condition', but hey, who knows?

The arty inventory includes paintings and prints, African and Oriental art, antiques and glassware. Everything is well laid out, with fairly detailed information provided on all the pieces, although some lack photographs. Prices are in Euros and Deutsche Marks, which is a little confusing at first, but easily converted into sterling.

WORLD WIDE AUCTION

www.wwauction.com ★★★★

World Wide Auction specialises in numismatics – sales of rare paper money – and a small selection of coins as well. Prices are much cheaper than we've seen in shops and the range of items is impressive, with cash from countries as diverse as Brazil, Vietnam, Yemen, East Caribbean States and even dear old Blighty. The site isn't much to look at, but the information provided is good, with pictures illustrating most of the items. There are regular auctions throughout the year.

WORDS: SHAUN MARIN; PICTURES: PA

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

INVESTING

Citywire.co.uk
www.citywire.co.uk
Company news and advice.

The Motley Fool UK
www.fool.co.uk
One of *thenet*'s favourite sites, offering helpful advice for the learner investor.

Ask Figaro
www.askfigaro.com
Compare financial products' results here.

SHARE TRADING

Stocktrade
www.stocktrade.co.uk
Keep your finger on the pulse with this site, which offers real-time prices.

Barclays Stockbrokers
www.barclays-stockbrokers.co.uk
Real-time share dealing from one of the biggest names in banking.

Forex-CMC
www.forex-cmc.co.uk
The first online foreign-exchange dealer.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Investment Week
www.invweek.co.uk
Monetary advice from the in-depth *Investment Week*.

Eye4money
www.eye4money.com
UK and US financial information – plus a share simulation game.

hemscott.NET
www.hemscott.com
Get access to a veritable goldmine of analysis from this easy-to-use, no-nonsense site.

Online foreign-exchange pioneer, Forex-CMC

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Interactive Investor International
www.iii.co.uk
Advice for individual investors.

Money Unlimited
www.moneyunlimited.co.uk
Sound financial advice from *The Guardian*.

MONEY NEWS AND SHARE PRICES

FT.com
www.ft.com
The mother of all money sites, from the makers of the financial bible.

Bloomberg.com UK
www.bloomberg.co.uk
Up-to-date data for the professional investor.

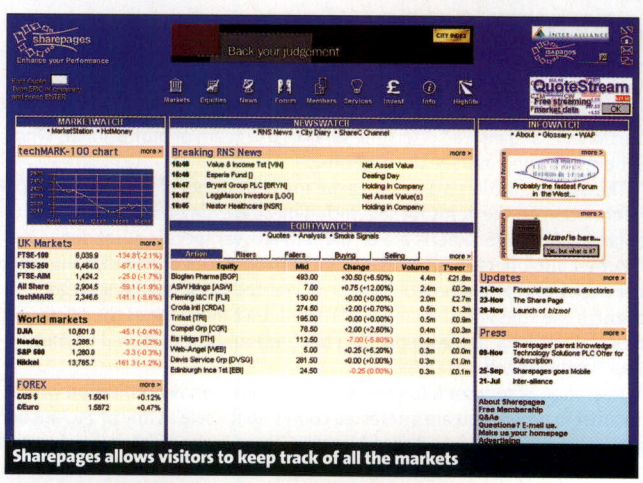
Sharepages.com
www.sharepages.com
News from all markets in a quick-glance format.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

UK finance
uk.finance
Advice on a variety of topics.

CHAT ROOM

Investor MSN
investor.msn.com
Chat with other online finance fans around the world.


Sharepages allows visitors to keep track of all the markets

NEED MORE? Save money on CDs See p46
Directory See p94

Lower prices... and more cover

No matter what you want to buy, the Asset Advance card from Lloyds TSB will revolutionise your shopping experience

The best price guaranteed...

After a bargain? The Asset Advance card has been specifically designed for that purpose offering a free 'Best Price' guarantee on goods worth up to £1000 bought with the Asset Advance card. This means if you see the item on sale at a cheaper price within 30 days, you could claim the difference.*

...and longer warranty!

What's more, Asset Advance cardholders also enjoy Extra Protection with a free extended warranty on many new household appliances bought with their Asset Advance card. This can add a full year to the manufacturer's guarantee for appliances worth up to £1000. So Asset Advance cardholders can rest easy knowing that the goods they buy will be protected for an extra year!

Terms and conditions apply to both Best Price cover and Extended Warranty.
*Less the first £25 and excluding goods such as holidays, food, travel, clothing and motor accessories.

Any Asset Advance cardholder who uses the card to buy an item will have the price difference refunded, if they spot the same item on sale at a lower price within 30 days!

Products include Audio/hi-fi, including CD player, television (up to 28"), video cassette recorder, camcorder, microwave, oven, hob cooker, fridge and freezer

The card for you and what it can do

- No annual fee
- Competitive standard rate of **11.9% APR**
- Balance transfer rate of just **3.9% APR** for 6 months
- **Free** extended warranty with Extra Protection
- Best Price cover
- **Free** additional card

For further information log on to **www.lloydstsb.com** or phone 0800 056 0150 (Quote reference: net)

Lloyds TSB

General Insurance advice is provided by Lloyds TSB Insurance Services Limited which acts as an independent intermediary for a number of insurers under the Association of British Insurers' Code of Practice. Registered in England No. 968406. 71, Lombard Street, London, EC3P 3BS.

ASSET ADVANCE

online shopping is fun and easy

Here's the net and Lloyds TSB Asset Advance guide to buying from the Internet

Always make sure that you buy from 'secure' sites. This will ensure that your personal details are encrypted before they are sent, and therefore cannot be read by anyone else. You can see if you are on a secure site by checking if the URL begins with 'https://',or look out for a padlock or key symbol on your screen

Be wary when shopping with companies that aren't a brand-name. If you haven't heard of a company, ask friends if they are aware of it, or do an Internet search to see if anyone has had any bad experiences shopping there.

Never send your credit card details by email. It's far easier for emails to be intercepted, so don't oblige if a company asks you for them.

Keep an eye out for contact numbers and postal addresses on the site. If something does go wrong, you can easily reach someone from the company.

Make sure to print out your contract – it's the only permanent record of your purchases. If you don't get one after completing the buying process,email the company and ask them to send you one.

Note the delivery costs and times before you buy – you don't want to end up with a hefty delivery charge on something that doesn't cost very much.

And if something does go wrong, don't panic! Despite scare stories, online shopping is just as safe as the traditional method. It's in the online store's interest to sort out any problems as quickly as they can.

For written details of the credit terms, please write to Lloyds TSB Bank plc, PO Box 112, Canons House, Canons Way, Bristol BS99 7LB. How much Lloyds TSB Bank plc will lend (if any) and the issue of an Asset Advance card by Lloyds TSB depends on Lloyds TSB's assessment of your financial position. You must be over 18 to apply. Interest rates may vary. There is no interest-free period. Lloyds TSB Bank plc is a member of the Banking Ombudsman Scheme and a signatory to the Banking Code.

www.lloydstsb.com

FOCUS:// Homework helpers

The answer's on the Net

Today's students don't need to trek to the library for homework help when the world's on their desktop

S-COOL!

www.s-cool.co.uk ★★★★★

Without a doubt, this is the most stylish homework help site in the UK, with a bright design and lots of navigational interactivity. The content exceeds all expectations, with page after page of comprehensive notes, often with excellent interactive elements and revision summaries ready for you to print out and keep.

Exclusively tailored to GCSE, A and AS Level coursework, S-Cool can help get your head around some pretty advanced concepts. Its step-by-step format lets you identify your weaknesses within the curriculum and focus your learning efforts on these areas. You can even test yourself as you go, checking your progress against the answer sheets provided. Beneath its deceptively breezy exterior (and, let's face it, awful name) lurks a seriously in-depth learning experience, one that disciplined students will find especially useful.

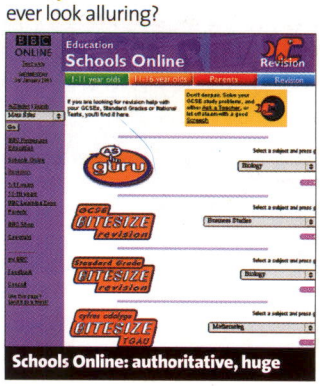
Let the Web take the sting out of homework

BBC SCHOOLS ONLINE

www.bbc.co.uk/education/revision

★★★★

As might be expected of the BBC, these pages pack a mighty wallop. To merely call them comprehensive is an understatement on a par with saying that the Sistine Chapel has some nice paintings in it. The content is broadly divided between GCSE, AS level and Key Stages 2 and 3, but the Scottish Standard Grade examinations are also catered for, and you can even revise in Welsh. The thought-provoking revision guides and tests are complemented by an online scoring system and if despite all this you still get stuck, you can even email a teacher. On the negative side, the design philosophy might best be described as dull but worthy, but when did schoolrooms ever look alluring?



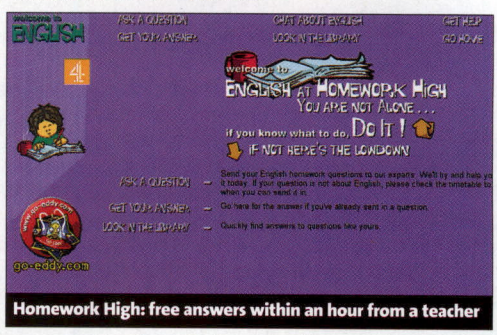
Schools Online: authoritative, huge

@ If you have to bookmark one...

HOMEWORK HIGH

www.homeworkhigh.com ★★★★★

The beauty of this Channel 4 site is that it gets straight to the crux of the matter, which with a homework deadline looming is, of course, precisely what you need. A few clicks from the homepage and you are in with a fair chance of receiving a reply from a qualified teacher within an hour of posting it, instantly elevating the status of Homework High to one of genuine lifesaver. All the key subjects, such as history and English, are represented for students up to the age of 16, but the French section is particularly merit-worthy. The terrors of correct pronunciation may be banished forever thanks to this superb service, as many of the questions are answered with a personalised sound file. If you can't get a reply the same day – and you will be told as soon as you post your question – you can still check through the archives, which rather sensibly will attempt to tailor the results of a search to the age of the inquirer. As regards the design of the site, sensible is very much the name of the game. The cute and inviting graphics remain undemanding of bandwidth – and when you're in a hurry, who wants to contend with a half-meg download? Just think of this as an SAS-style site: you get in quick, extract what you need and your teachers will never know what hit 'em.



Homework High: free answers within an hour from a teacher

HOMEWORK ELEPHANT

www.homeworkelephant.co.uk

★★★★

Homework Elephant is apparently the brainchild of 13-year-old student named James Reeve. Together with his father, they have assembled a monumental overview of learning sites, but the Homework Elephant is much more than a list of links. The power is in the presentation, with each site categorised and reviewed by a number of criteria, so for instance, if you need assistance on algebra for Year 7 to 13 pupils, you can find the relevant sites with the minimum of fuss. A hints page provides advice on how to approach homework, while the Agony Elephant is a moderated bulletin board. These additional services are of variable worth, but in overall terms, this is one Elephant you won't want to forget in a hurry.

EXAMAID

www.examaid.co.uk ★★★

Lucky indeed is the child who has survived school without suffering some crisis or other, be it bullying, trouble at home or the loss of a loved one. Such problems can adversely affect a pupil's work, especially if something unexpected or upsetting occurs at a crucial juncture in the school year. Examaid offers help via a confidential conduit to professional counsellors, contactable either through the Web or by phone, and although the online content is presently rather spartan, the

WORDS: JOHN GOSLING; PICTURES: KOBAL

potential is there to create a vitally important service. This will only be possible if people use the site and by the generosity of public support, so even if you think your life is plain sailing, get clicking and see what both they and you have to offer.

BRAINPOP

www.brainpop.com ★★★★★

With its superbly crafted Flash animations, Brainpop provides a splendidly entertaining variation on the concept of homework help; the questions posted to this site can end up being turned into movies! Don't expect an instant answer, but there's already a good selection to search through. The site covers an impressive range of subjects, from acne to woodwind.

The movies themselves are not excessively large, but pack in a lot, with full audio commentaries and a very dry wit. A substantial number of quality learning and entertainment features further enhance the site, and there even is a loyalty scheme which allows you to rack up points with each visit, which are redeemable against various Brainpop-branded products.

Brainpop covers the lot, from acne to woodwind

EXPLORE SCIENCE

www. explorescience.com ★★★★

Another great use of the Flash plug-in, but unlike Brainpop.com, the animations presented here demonstrate serious scientific principles with a daunting degree of interactivity. They're not terribly pretty to look at, but coaxing this sort of functionality out of Flash has got to be considered noteworthy in itself. Instructions are sparse at worst, mind-bogglingly complicated at best, so this isn't a site to visit for the sheer fun of it – although there is something strangely compelling about fiddling with weights and pendulums. Teachers might be interested to learn that the site allows academics to build their own student course work pages into the Explorescience experience.

With the Government launching Science Year to promote interest in science among secondary school students, this site will be well worth adding to your favourites. The scheme doesn't kick off until September (to cover the academic year 2001-2002) but schools can be expected to be gearing up well in advance. There is also a sister site to try at ***www.exploremath. com***.

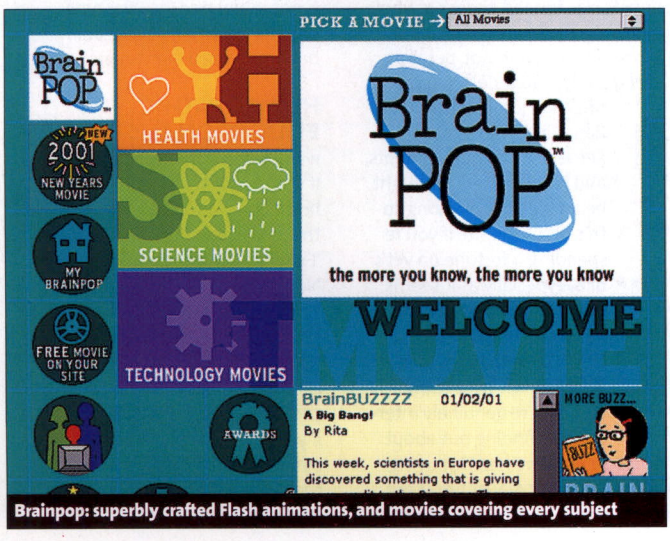
THE MUSICLAND

www.themusicland.co.uk ★★★★

Self-proclaimed as 'The UK's online community for music education,' you can't really argue with the description once you have sampled the varied content of Musicland. With specific sections for GCSE, A Level and Key Stage 3, and a clear intent to become a community-style resource, the potential is obvious.

Equally, it's early days and the site clearly needs more contributions (the chat boards and hall of fame midi submission pages are just getting started), but there is already a quality selection of homework help pages. These range from a comprehensive glossary to history of music essays and help with music composition.

An excellent infrastructure is already in place, so giving the opportunity to expand, which should come with increased traffic to the site. The Musicland is destined to become a major resource for music students.



Brainpop: superbly crafted Flash animations, and movies covering every subject

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

FunkandWagnalls.com offers help with both current and historical events

LANGUAGE TIPS AND COURSES

Travlang
www.travlang.com
Treat yourself to a whopping 70 languages to learn online.

FreeTranslation.com
www.freetranslation.com
Translates tricky phrases in a flash.

Internet Public Library
www.ipl.org/youth/hello
Learn 30 languages completely free of charge.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The Open University
www-icdl.open.ac.uk
The Open University on the Net.

Tele-School Online
www.tele-school.org
Learn online and interact, too.

CONVERTERS AND SYMBOLS

MegaConverter
www.megaconverter.com
The title says it all. Convert from just about anything to anything else.

Symbols.com
www.symbols.com
Online list of graphic symbols.

Learnfree provides RealVideo tutorials

QUOTATIONS AND PROVERBS

Bartleby.com
www.bartleby.com
Spice up your essays with a quotation.

Famous Quotations Network
www.famous-quotations.com
Search for quotations by country or author.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Webopedia
www.pcwebopedia.com
An online encyclopedia specialising in IT topics.

Online Dictionaries, Glossaries and Encyclopedias
stommel.tamu.edu/~baum/hyperref.html
Large list of online resources.

FunkandWagnalls.com
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Selection of historical articles and a perspective on modern events.

PICK UP A USEFUL SKILL

Learnfree
www.learnfree.com
Features RealVideo tutorials.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

Misc.education
www.deja.com/group/misc.education
Discuss educational matters here.

VISIT A CHAT ROOM

The National Forum
www.national-forum.com/index.html
Meet other students and teachers through The National Forum.

NEED MORE? Useful addresses for kids The Directory p95

FOCUS:// Alternative medicine

Get back to your roots

Traditional remedies have hit the Net in a big way; we've cut out the clutter to provide the best sites

You won't find this at Sainsbury's...

AURAVITA

www.auravita.com ★★★★

Fake smiles ahoy as Alexandra the nutritional expert beams out from the page, inviting you to 'ask the expert', buy perfume, or pick up hangover pills at discount prices. For those interested in finding out more about certain products there are links to articles that explain the various ins and outs of what you're popping into your body. Click on the homeopathy link and you'll find everything from aromatherapy through to specific herbal formulations, with plenty of homeopathic remedies available online. There are always special savings on offer – just click on the promotions link. And, if you know what you're looking for, the actual homeopathic remedies are much, much cheaper than their High Street counterparts.

ALLCURES

www.allcures.com ★★★★

Curiously, cures aren't the only thing on offer at allcures.com: there's also allbeautyproducts.com, alltoiletries.com, allphotoshop.com, allhealthinfo.com, allpharmacy.com and allternative.com. If you're not into the alternative range, then they offer a prescriptions service (NHS and private) in addition to a full range of over-the-counter medicines. And for those who haven't got the time to wait in a queue to see a doctor, there's an email-an-expert service offering advice on everything from weight loss to flu information. Alternatively, browse the site to learn what cure is best for your ailment. The helpful A-Z of Health takes you through all the various ailments and then lists possible causes and cures, which are, naturally, all available to buy. Easy.

HELIOS HOMEOPATHIC PHARMACY

www.helios.co.uk ★★★★

In Greek mythology, Helios was a sun god. In this instance, however, it's the name of a Kent pharmacy which prepares remedies to traditional 'Hahnemannian' (named after the gentlemen who popularised homeopathy) standards. Authentically, it has qualified homeopaths in nearly all of its staff positions. You can visit the clinic, order homeopathy books online or arrange for pharmacy tours, slide shows, talks and retailer training. For those who have no desire to go to Tunbridge Wells, cures and remedies can also be bought online. The list of available goods is not integrated into the order process, however, which can make online buying a nightmare.

HOMEOPATHIC EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

www.homeopathic.com ★★★★

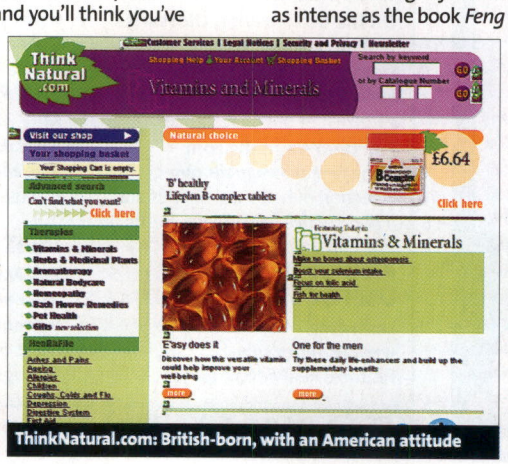
If you're not looking for a career in homeopathy, you won't appreciate the essays this site offers (such as 'Extremely Dilute Solutions Create Non-Melting Ice Crystals in Room Temperature Water: Implications on Homeopathic Medicine'). But it's not all theory: there's quite a lot of stuff on sale and, helpfully, it's categorised by the ailment it treats. If your complaints are too troublesome to wait for delivery, however, there's general advice on how to cope with various issues such as

@ If you have to bookmark one...

THINKNATURAL

www.thinknatural.com ★★★★★

It's always a struggle in a competitive market for one site to stand out among the others. Pop into ThinkNatural.com, however, and you'll think you've walked into an American pharmacy – it seems to have everything. The design is so bright and welcoming, you almost expect it to chirp 'thank you for ordering your St John's Wort, and have a nice day!' – but, fear not, this is a British site, so that fate is avoided. For most orders they promise next-day delivery, with free delivery for orders over £20 in the UK. And it's not that difficult to spend, spend, spend when you start shopping here. Prices for all homeopathic cures are competitive – not necessarily cheap, as it seems that you can't get too many remedies for under £4, but you'll be hard pushed to find any sites that are much cheaper. All brands are on offer, whether Weleda or Bach Remedies, as well as cures for your pets. Yes, indeed, there's a whole section dedicated to improving the health of your pet, which seems slightly excessive (although not, perhaps, as intense as the book *Feng Shui for Your Cat*). You can find Pet Homeopathic Remedies, Pet Herbal Remedies and Supplements, and Pet Grooming. It might be an idea to pop along to this bit of the site if you're spending a fortune on vet's bills, especially as it seems many vets now 'work more holistically with animals'. Never seen that on *Animal Hospital*, but who knows? So, if you're genuinely interested in finding out about alternative health, buying remedies or just browsing, this is a useful place to start.



ThinkNatural.com: British-born, with an American attitude

WORDS: NOAM FRIEDLANDER; PICTURES: CORBIS, IMAGEBANK

insomnia, allergies, dental needs, detoxing and general medicine.

HOMEOPATH.CO.UK

www.homeopath.co.uk ★★★★

Drugs, drugs everywhere, and all available to buy – surely an addicts' heaven for those who want to trot off to the online pharmacy and shop till they drop. And that may be well and good if you actually know what you're off to buy. Some of us out there may have a clue as to what's good for coughs and colds, lumbar trouble or constant headaches, but most of us are in the dark. This is the primary fault of Homeopath.co.uk: it doesn't give you enough direction as to what product you should use. Instead, you have to read through the long (OK it's informative, but it *is* long) list and go through all the descriptions. What might have been better is if the site had allowed you to search for products by typing in your symptoms. Ah well, nothing's quite perfect – but it is easy to use and, most importantly of all, has a directory of homeopaths in the UK – incredibly useful.

HOMEOPATHY HOME

www.homeopathyhome.com

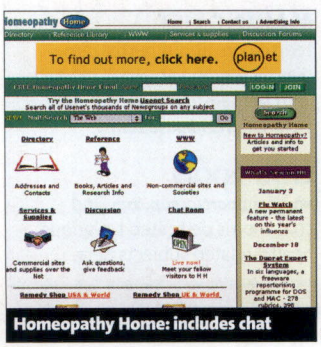
★★★★

Although this site has plenty of references and links, what makes it stand out is that it offers a chat room so you can talk to fellow alternative health users, ask advice or swap remedies. You must remember, however, that all answers to health questions are not necessarily being answered by professional homeopaths. In fact, similar to most other chat rooms, Homeopathy Home relies upon the goodwill of the visitors of its site, and assumes that they aren't necessarily there to cause damage. There's probably little to fear, however, as only a peculiar type of hacker would bother to dole out the wrong herb names as a prank.

WELEDA (UK) LTD

www.weleda.co.uk ★★★★

Weleda? Weleda was a priestess of healing and a well-known historical personality who lived at the start of



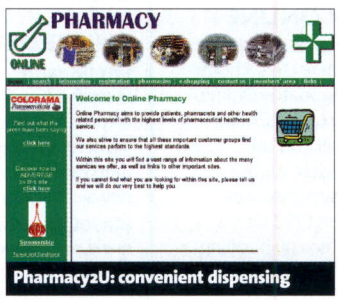
Homeopathy Home: includes chat »

LINKS ;-) ONLINE PRESCRIPTIONS

Doctor on your doorstep

Looking for drugs over the Internet? You know, hardcore: only available over the counter from pharmacists? Well there are sites in the UK that will deliver; the downside is that you need a prescription, as these are legal Internet pharmacies.

One such site is ***www.pharmacy2u. co.uk***, which claims to be the UK's first online pharmacy. And according to Phil Day, a pharmacist at Pharmacy2U, 'We operate in much the same way as a conventional pharmacy, but we offer many advantages. You can order from our site at any time and, if you need advice about medicines or minor ailments, we can help. You can email us via the Web site, phone us, or use our 'call back' facility.'



Pharmacy2U: convenient dispensing

The site dispenses NHS and private prescriptions. But before you get excited about the idea of being able to cheat the system and get your mitts on drugs over the Net, remember that, due to legal reasons, you need to post your prescriptions before they can be dispensed. The day when prescriptions can be electronically transferred from doctors to pharmacies is on the horizon, and trials are underway this year to test its feasibility. It is unlikely, though, electronic transfers would be a reality before 2004.

In the meantime they offer an 'ask the pharmacist' section which, according to Day, 'is very popular, with people finding it an ideal way to ask questions that they might otherwise be too embarrassed to ask their local pharmacist'.

Another online pharmacy is ***www.online-pharmacy.org.uk***. Although they don't dispense prescriptions, the site does provide contact details of pharmacies around the country, as well as health information. The company also gives a list of useful links, like NHS Direct and the National Pharmaceutical Association.

This is a service that you'll find on quite a few Web pharmacies. Just find an online chemist, either here or in the States (remember: some products from the US aren't available in the UK or may be known by a different name), describe your ailments and it will direct you to products you need. While Boots is a familiar enough name, many might not have heard of ***www.mosspharmacy.co.uk***, which claims to be the third largest pharmacy group. Although it doesn't dispense over the Net, it will tell you where to go to find one of their branches.

Pharmacy2U dispenses both NHS and private prescriptions

The MED Clinic (***www.ukyes.com***), meanwhile, offers 32 50mg Viagra pills at £432, and claims to be 'the most reliable UK online source for Viagra, Xenical, Propecia, Regaine and Zyban, with free prescription, delivery, and a discount on repeat orders.' Worth a go, if you need some pep in your life.

the Christian era – but don't start thinking that this is about to be some Priestess of Healing site with Wicca groups discussing the ins and outs of female solidarity and worshipping some goddess. Weleda is, in fact, the name of a leading homeopathic company which supplies alternative drugs aplenty with facts galore. The site is frequently used by other homeopathic Web sites as a trusted brand. If you're still not sure what you want, use the remedy finder. You can also email the Weleda pharmacist and ask questions.

FREEMAN'S HOMEOPATHIC PHARMACY

www.freechem.co.uk ★★★

Initially it's a bit confusing to try to find the drugs and cures you need while navigating yourself around this Glaswegian shop. Yet Freeman's pride themselves as *the* manufacturers and suppliers of 'the highest quality homeopathic specials, all prepared by traditional methods'. You should note that only complementary medicines are supplied by mail, however, so a trip to Glasgow (or your local pharmacist) would be in order if you want some 'harder' stuff. You can also arrange a private consultation with a qualified homeopath.

THE HOMEOPATHIC HELP PAGES

www.homeopathy-uk.com/hhp/

★★★★

If you're new to this homeopathy lark, this is as good a place as any to feel your way around. The design is fairly simplistic, but seems to be intended for those who've just started to dabble in the Net or homeopathy and don't want to be confronted with too much technology. Hence the site is designed for quick loading, and you can download the whole site (compressed to 180K, only a few seconds even on a 56K modem) for later reference. Once you've mastered the 'Homeopathy For Beginners' section you can treat yourself for basic conditions, from bruises through to earaches – but, be warned, not everybody is the same so not all the remedies will work for you.

HOMEOPATHY ONLINE

www.homeopaths.org.uk ★★★★

Unlike other sites, there isn't a huge online shop at Homeopathy Online, but there are plenty of links. And some of them will set you up with such natural essentials as Australian Bush Flower Essences or a Homeopathic First Aid Kit – a useful little extra which all budding homeopath users shouldn't be without. And if you're worried about taking any new-fangled pills, what better endorsement could you have but this: 'The principal suppliers we use hold the Royal Warrant as Chemists to Her Majesty the Queen and Queen Mother and for Homeopathic Medicines to HRH the Prince of Wales.' I say, good show!

Homeopath.co.uk: online shopping, with a wide array of products on offer

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Shed the pounds by following WeightWatcher.com's easy-to-use point system

ONLINE DIAGNOSES

InteliHealth
www.intelihealth.com
A full and frank site to help solve problems. Also includes up-to-date health news and an email newsletter service.

MayoClinic.com
www.mayoclinic.com
Features a personalised health planner, online weight-loss programme and news briefs.

Quackwatch
www.quackwatch.com
As a member of the Consumer Federation of America, this site endeavours to combat health-related frauds while encouraging visitors to make sound choices.

DIETING SITES

Prevention
www.healthy ideas.com
Online women's magazine, featuring recipe ideas and fitness articles.

3 Fat Chicks on a Diet!
www. 3fatchicks. com
Find motivation through the success stories of three formerly overweight sisters. Includes recipe and exercise ideas.

WeightWatchers.com
uk.weightwatchers.com
Helps you lose weight with a 'point system'; also includes recipe ideas.

PREGNANCY

Mother and Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Features shopping, chat and a dads' zone – oh, and a video of a water birth, if you really want to see such a thing.

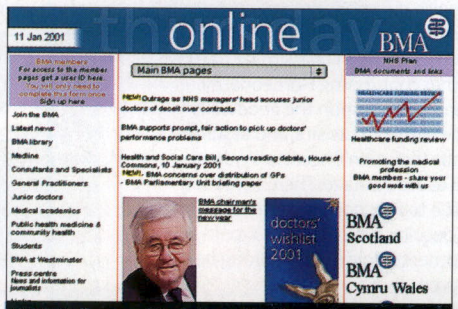
The Baby Register
www.thebabyregistry.co.uk
Share tips and advice with other mothers and fathers.

OFFICIAL HEALTH SITES

NHS Direct
www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/direct.htm
Get help from the NHS 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

BMA Online
www.bma.org.uk
Provides information on how to become a doctor or nurse, as well as related news.

British Dental Health Foundation
www.dentalhealth.org.uk
Get your dentistry queries answered online.



BMA Online provides information for professionals

NEWSGROUP

misc.health.alternative
Discuss homeopathy with others.

MAILING LIST

Learn more about herbal remedies by sending an email marked 'info herbalist' to ***majordomo@victoriangreenhouse.com***.

CHAT ROOM

www.support-group.com Find chat rooms dedicated to various health-related subjects here.

NEED MORE? Useful health addresses The Directory p94

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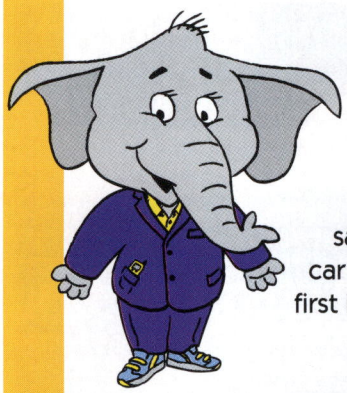

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Royal Bank Of Scotland
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ZDNet ***www.hotfiles.com***

<ENCYCLOPEDIAS>

Encarta ***encarta.msn.com***
Encyclopedia Britannica
www.britannica.com
Encyclopedia.com
www.encyclopedia.com

STYLE NEW ENTRY

GET A CLUE AT LIFEBYTE

Want to know how to please that special lady (or lad) by hitting all the right buttons in bed? Or perhaps you've had one hangover too many this year already (hey, it's only February!) and want to know how to drink without fear. Maybe you're looking for the perfect break to kill the New Year blues. Lifebyte's got all that – and more. Launched last July, the site aims to help young adults in the UK cope with all that life throws at them – from buying a house to choosing the right credit card to picking up sensible car insurance. There's a chat room, where you can discuss your woes and personal triumphs with folks of similar ilk; a shopping channel which links to popular online stores, such as Amazon and ChangesLive.com; and general bits and pieces to while away the rainy British afternoons. If the help you seek isn't online, drop Lifebyte an email for a touch of personal advice from one of their experts.
www.lifebyte.com

Funk and Wagnalls
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Illustrated Library
www.illustratedlibrary.com

<FOOD & DRINK>

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RoomService ***www.roomservice.co.uk***
Sainsbury's ***www.tasteforlife.co.uk***
squaremeal.co.uk
www.squaremeal.co.uk
Thorntons ***www.thorntons.co.uk***
Toptable ***www.toptable.co.uk***
Uncorked ***www.uncorked.co.uk***

<GAMES>
Guides & companies

Dreamcast ***www.dreamcast.com***
Future Games Network
www.fgnetwork.com
GameCenter ***www.gamecenter.com***
Gamers.com ***www.gamers.com***
GameSpot ***www.gamespot.com***
GameSpyder ***www.gamespyder.com***
GameStats ***www.gamestats.com***
MacGaming
www.maccentral.com/games
MultiPlayer ***www.multiplayer.com***
Nintendo ***www.nintendo.com***
PlayStation ***www.playstation.com***
Sega ***www.sega-europe.com***
Total Video Games
www.totalvideogames.com

<GENEALOGY>

British Ancestral Research
www.brit-a-r.demon.co.uk
British Heraldic Institute
www.kwtelecom.com/heraldry
Family Search ***www.familysearch.com***
Genealogy Research Source
www.genealogy.book www.pro.gov.uk
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***

<GOVERNMENT>
Britain

10 Downing Street
www.number-10.gov.uk
Arts Council ***www.artscouncil.org.uk***
British Monarchy ***www.royal.gov.uk***
Department for Culture, Media and Sport ***www.culture.gov.uk***
Dept of Health ***www.doh.gov.uk***
Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions
www.detr.gov.uk
Ministry of Defence ***www.mod.uk***
Open.gov.uk ***www.open.gov.uk***
Scottish Parliament
www.scotland.gov.uk
Welsh Assembly ***www.wales.gov.uk***

The World

Australia ***www.fed.gov.au***
China ***www.gov.cn***
European Commission ***europa.eu.int***
France ***www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr***
Germany ***www.bundesregierung.de***
Russia ***www.gov.ru***
United Nations ***www.un.org***
United States ***www.whitehouse.gov***

<HEALTH>
Doctors & diagnosis

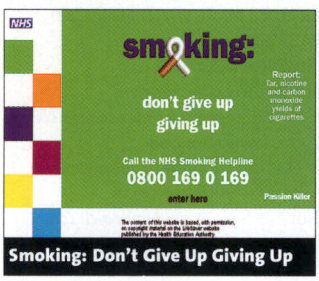
Ask Dr Weil ***cgi.pathfinder.com/drweil***
Ask The Doc ***www.ask-the-doc.com***
BackCare ***www.backpain.org***
British Dental Association
www.bda-dentistry.org.uk

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS

British Medical Journal ***www.bmj.com***
The Brompton Dental Clinic
www.mercuryfree.co.uk
Healthy Ideas ***www.healthyideas.com***
MedRef ***www.medscout.com***
Mental Health
www.mentalhealth.com
NetDoctor ***www.netdoctor.co.uk***
Patient ***www.patient.co.uk***

Support & information

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Alzheimer's Disease Society
www.alzheimers.org.uk
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cancer Bacup
www.cancerbacup.org.uk
Centre For Online Addiction
netaddiction.com
Diabetes UK ***www.diabetic.org.uk***
Don't Smoke ***www.dontsmoke.com***



Smoking: Don't Give Up Giving Up

Fitness Online ***www.fitnessonline.com***
HIV/AIDS Information & Links
www.brad.ac.uk/staff/ijhodgson/hivlinks.htm
National Meningitis Trust
www.meningitis-trust.org.uk
Natural Naturally
www.naturalnaturally.com
Smoking: Don't Give Up Giving Up
www.givingupsmoking.co.uk
ThinkNatural.com
www.thinknatural.com

<HOMES>

Estate agents

Bushells ***www.bushells.com***
Chancellors ***www.chancellors.co.uk***
CityLet ***www.citylet.com***
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www.cluttons.com
Foxtons ***www.foxtons.co.uk***
Friend & Falcke
www.friendandfalcke.co.uk
Goldschmidt Howland
www.goldschmidt-howland.co.uk
Hamptons ***www.hamptons.co.uk***
John D. Wood
www.johndwood.co.uk
Knight Frank ***www.knightfrank.co.uk***
Strutt & Parker
www.struttandparker.co.uk
Your Move ***www.your-move.co.uk***

Property finders

Accommodation Directory
www.accommodation.com
Assertahome ***www.assertahome.com***
Bamboo Avenue
www.bambooavenue.com
BBC Good Homes
www.goodhomes.beeb.com
Easier.co.uk ***www.easier.co.uk***
Global Resident
www.globalresident.com
Homefile UK ***www.homefileuk.co.uk***
Home Free Home
www.homefreehome.co.uk
Homepages ***www.homepages.co.uk***
Home Sale ***www.home-sale.co.uk***
Home to Home
www.home-to-home.co.uk
HouseNet ***www.housenet.co.uk***
Internet Property Finder
www.propertyfinder.co.uk
Lets Direct ***www.letsdirect.co.uk***
Pavilions of Splendour
www.heritage.co.uk
Property Sight
www.property-sight.co.uk
Propwatch ***www.propwatch.com***
UK Property Gold ***www.ukpg.co.uk***

<HUMOUR>

Comedy Online
www.comedyonline.co.uk
Comics.com ***www.comics.com***
Comedy Zone ***www.comedy-zone.net***
Cyber Comedian
webtamers.com/comedian.html
Funplanet ***www.funplanet.co.uk***
Funny ***www.funny.co.uk***
G-Wizz ***www.g-wizz.net***
JokeDepot ***www.jokedepot.com***
JokePost ***www.jokepost.com***
Jongleurs ***www.jongleurs.com***
The Onion ***www.theonion.com***
TV Go Home ***www.tvgohome.com***
Uproar ***www.uproar.com***
Whatever ***www.whatever.uk.com***

<JOBS>

Employment Agencies

Agency Central
www.agencycentral.co.uk
Brook Street ***www.brookstreet.co.uk***
Independent Appointments
www.indappts.co.uk
Manpower ***www.manpower.co.uk***
Reed ***www.reed.co.uk***

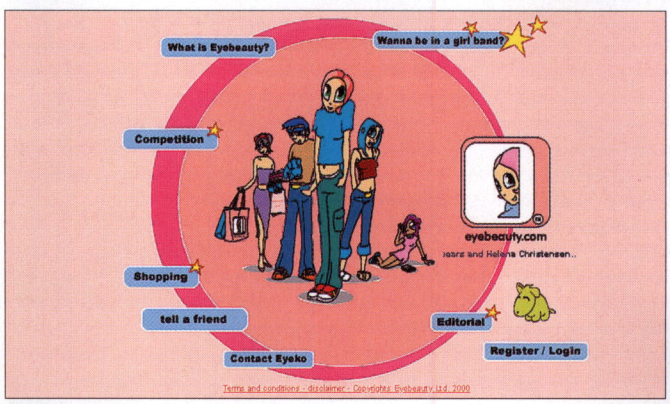
Job searches

Brilliant Careers
brilliantcareers.channel4.com
Expat Network
www.expatnetwork.co.uk
Fish4Jobs ***www.fish4jobs.co.uk***
Gradunet ***www.gradunet.co.uk***
Guardian ***www.jobsunlimited.co.uk***
Jobsearch UK ***www.jobsearch.co.uk***
Jobsin ***www.jobsin.co.uk***
Jobsite ***www.jobsite.co.uk***
Overseas Jobs ***www.overseasjobs.com***
Personnelnet ***www.personnelnet.com***
Stepstone ***www.stepstone.co.uk***
Total Jobs ***www.totaljobs.com***
Wide Eyes ***www.wideyes.com***
Yelcom ***www.yelcom.com***

<KIDS>

0-8

Babynames.com
www.babynames.com
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cartoon Network
www.cartoonnetwork.co.uk
CITV ***www.citv.co.uk***
Fox Kids ***www.foxkids.co.uk***
FunSchool ***www.funschool.com***
Kidscom
www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/mouse.html
Mother & Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Nickelodeon ***www.nickjr.com***
Sesame Street
www.sesamestreet.com/preschool



KIDS NEW ENTRY

FIND SOME ONLINE GIRL POWER

Spanking-new, with sassy jap-animated graphics, eyebeauty.com is sure to get teenage girls across the UK clicking away. In fact, the craze has already started, thanks to lass mags *More!* and *Bliss*, whose enthusiasm for eyebeauty.com's own cosmetic range lead to a rush for the products at Fenwick's in London. But the site, created by Hard Candy's Max Leykind, is about more than just makeup. Need-to-know gossip and the inside scoop on what the top celebs are wearing await the hungry surfer; with the site's animated tour guide, Eyeko, adding a running commentary. Online shopping is available, and includes sumptuous items such as MyMy Body Souffle in Yuzu Fruit!
www.eyebeauty.com

8 plus

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Anything!Student
www.anythingstudent.com
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ChildU ***www.childu.com***
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Disney.co.uk ***www.disney.co.uk***
EduWeb ***www.eduweb.co.uk***
Family Education
www.familyeducation.com
BJ Pinchbeck Homework Helper
www.bjpinchbeck.com
MatMice ***www.matmice.com***
Pupiline.net ***www.pupiline.net***
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Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
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Wizziwiz.co.uk
www.wizziwiz.co.uk
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Cyberlawyer
cyberlawyer.city2000.com
Desktop Lawyer
www.desktoplawyer.freeserve.net
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www.lawright.co.uk
Law Solutions ***www.lawsolutions.co.uk***
Legaldocs ***www.legaldocs.com***
UK Law Online
www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn

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Online mags

Foocha ***www.foocha.com***
Garbled Communications UK
www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Show/1322
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Seven ***www.sevenmag.com***
Slate ***www.slate.com***
Suck ***www.suck.com***

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Volkswagen ***www.volkswagen.co.uk***
Volvo ***www.volvocars.volvo.co.uk***

<MUSEUMS & GALLERIES>

Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk
National Gallery
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Natural History Museum
www.nhm.ac.uk
Tate Gallery ***www.tate.org.uk***

<MUSIC>
Bands & artists

The Beatles
www.thebeatleswebsite.com
Blur ***www.blur.co.uk***
David Bowie ***www.davidbowie.com***
Chemical Brothers
musicfanclubs.org/chemical
Coldplay ***www.coldplay.com***
Fatboy Slim ***www.normancook.cjb.net***
Kylie Minogue ***www.kylie.com***
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Oasis ***www.oasisinet.com***
Radiohead ***www.radiohead.co.uk***
REM ***www.remhq.com***
Robbie Williams
www.robbiewilliams.co.uk
Spice Girls ***c3.vmg.co.uk/spicegirls***
Stereophonics
www.stereophonics.co.uk
Travis ***www.travisonline.com***
Westlife ***www.westlife.co.uk***

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Clickmusic ***www.clickmusic.co.uk***
Crunch ***www.crunch.co.uk***
Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***
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Mp3.com ***www.mp3.com***
Popwire ***www.popwire.com***
Vitaminic ***www.vitaminic.co.uk***

Online mixing

DJSounds.com ***www.djsounds.com***
eJay ***www.ejay.com***
Getoutthere ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***
Hobomusic ***www.hobomusic.com***
Home Recording
www.homerecording.com
Mouse Jam ***www.mousejam.com***
Scratch It ***www.turntable.de***
SS7X7 ***www.ss7x7.com***

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The Times ***www.the-times.co.uk***

News services

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ITN ***www.itn.co.uk***
NewsNow ***www.newsnow.co.uk***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
Reuters ***www.reuters.com/news***

<PEOPLE FINDERS>
Email addresses

Bigfoot ***bigfoot.com***
EmailFinder ***www.emailfinder.com***
Friends Reunited
www.friendsreunited.co.uk
People Site ***www.peoplesite.com***
WhoWhere ***www.whowhere.com***
Yahoo ***people.yahoo.com***

Phone numbers

BT Directory Enquiries
www.bt.co.uk/phonenetuk
Thomson Directories
www.thomweb.co.uk
Yellow Pages ***www.yell.co.uk***

<SCIENCE>
News & updates

BBC Science ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm***
Eureka Alert ***www.eurekalert.org***
NASA ***science.nasa.gov***
New Scientist
www.newscientist.com
WhyFiles ***whyfiles.news.wisc.edu***

<SEARCH ENGINES>

AltaVista ***www.altavista.digital.com***
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FAST ***alltheweb.com***
Google ***www.google.com***
HotBot ***www.hotbot.com***
Inter-Change ***www.inter-change.com***
Lycos ***www.lycos.com***
MetaCrawler ***www.metacrawler.com***
Mirago ***www.mirago.co.uk***
Northern Light ***www.nlsearch.com***

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www.auctionuniverse.co.uk
Bid4sport ***www.bid4sport.co.uk***
eBay ***www.ebay.co.uk***
eBid ***www.ebid.co.uk***
eSwap ***www.eswap.co.uk***
Eurobid ***www.eurobid.com***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
QXL ***www.qxl.com***
What Am I Bid? ***www.whatamibid.com***

Shopping directories

Best of British ***www.bestofbritish.com***
BritishShopping.com
www.british-shopping.com
Centreshop ***www.centreshop.com***
CleverPants ***www.cleverpants.com***
Coppernob Shopping.com
www.coppernobshopping.com
Cotswold Essential Outdoor
www.cotswold-outdoor.com
Crocus ***www.crocus.co.uk***
eDirectory ***www.edirectory.co.uk***
Enterprise City
www.enterprisecity.co.uk
The Gift Delivery Company
www.giftdeliveryco.com
Glasses-On-The-Web.Com
www.glasses-on-the-web.com
IMRG ***shops.imrg.org***
Inshop.co.uk ***www.inshop.co.uk***
Internet Shopping
www.internetshopping.com
Island Trading
www.island-trading.com
myTaxi ***www.mytaxi.co.uk***
ShopGuide ***www.shopguide.co.uk***
Shoppers Universe
shoppersuniverse.com

MUSIC NEW ENTRY

BE SORTED – VIRTUALLY

Finding the best groove no longer means combing every back-alley record store in London in search of flyers, thanks to Vdance. With a database of over 1300 UK venues, plus additional clubs in the Mediterranean to satisfy Ibiza and Ayia Napa addicts, excuses for staying in will no longer be tolerated. And listings aren't the only thing Vdance does well – new articles are updated daily, ensuring you're on top of all the headlines. Interviews with some of dance music's popular DJs crop up as well (Dave Pearce is quite fond of Brighton, apparently). And, as if that wasn't enough, Vdance also does shopping. Pick up the latest house and garage tracks online – the tasty listen-before-you-buy option boosts up that confidence factor no end. Or you can read other people's reaction to the tune before making your choice.

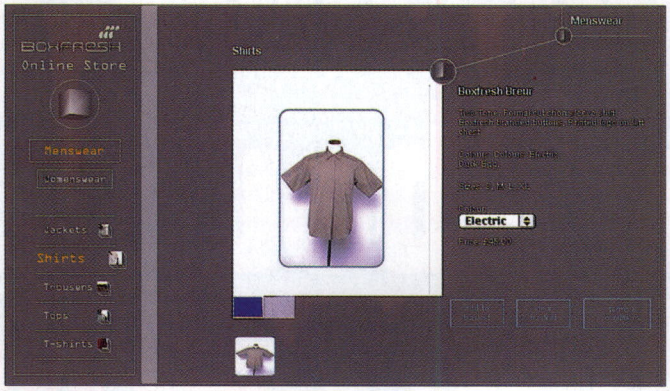
Speaking of other people, there's a little chat room to join if you want to shoot the breeze, and a load of competitions to enter to find out who's the luckiest amongst you. What more could you ask for from an online clubbing site? ***www.vdance.co.uk***

Shopping Superstore ***www.shoppingsuperstore.co.uk***
Shopping UK ***www.internetics.co.uk/shop***
ShopSmart ***www.shopsmart.com***
Shops On The Net ***www.sotn.com***
Shop Spy ***www.shopspy.co.uk***
Splendour.com ***www.splendour.com***
TopUKWebsites ***www.topukwebsites.com***
UK Shopping Zone ***ukshoppingzone.co.uk***
Virgin Net ***www.virgin.net/shopping***
Virtual Mall ***www.thevirtualmall.co.uk***
ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
Wedding List ***www.wedding.co.uk***

<SPORT>
FA Premiership clubs
Arsenal ***www.arsenal.co.uk***
Aston Villa ***www.astonvilla-fc.co.uk***
Bradford City ***www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk***
Charlton Athletic ***www.charlton-athletic.co.uk***
Chelsea ***www.chelseafc.co.uk***
Coventry City ***www.ccfc.co.uk***
Derby County ***www.dcfc.co.uk***
Everton ***www.evertonfc.com***
Ipswich Town ***www.itfc.co.uk***
Leeds United ***www.lufc.co.uk***
Leicester City ***www.lcfc.co.uk***
Liverpool ***www.liverpoolfc.net***
Manchester City ***www.mcfc.co.uk***
Manchester United ***www.manutd.com***
Middlesbrough ***www.mfc.co.uk***
Newcastle United ***www.nufc.co.uk***
Southampton ***www.saintsfc.co.uk/index.htm***
Sunderland ***www.sunderland-afc.com***
Tottenham Hotspur ***www.spurs.co.uk***
West Ham Utd ***www.whufc.co.uk***

Sport A-Z
Athletics ***www.nuff-respect.co.uk***
Cricket ***www.cricket4.com***
Cycling ***www.cycleweb.co.uk***
Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
Golf ***www.golfweb.com***
Hockey ***www.fieldhockey.com***
Martial Arts ***www.martial-arts-network.com***
Motorsport ***www.autosport.com***
Motorbike Racing ***www.motograndprix.com***
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
Rugby League ***www.rleague.com***
Rugby Union ***www.scrum.com***
Snooker ***www.snookernet.com***
Tennis ***www.tennis.com***
Wrestling ***www.wwf.com***

<STYLE & FASHION>
Main sites
BeautyLink ***www.beautylink.com***
Cosmopolitan ***www.cosmomag.com***
Defining Edge ***www.definingedge.com***
Fashion And Beauty Internet Association ***www.fbia.com***
Fashionfile ***www.fashionfile.com***
Fashion Mall ***www.fashionmall.com***
FashionNet ***www.fashion.net***



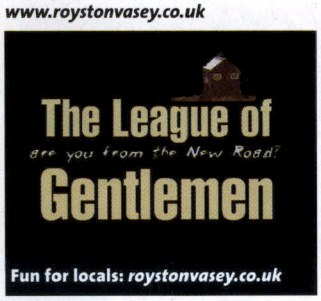
FASHION NEW ENTRY

BOXFRESH WARES GO ONLINE

Trendy urban fashion engineers Boxfresh just added online shopping to their revamped site, making a visit there all the more worthwhile. Contemporary Londoners will already be clued-up on Boxfresh's ethos: sturdy, yet chic, casual clothing which not only protects you from the elements, but makes you an acceptable member of the stylish sect. Their site supports this mode of thinking, combining muted graphics with *iD*-ish photographs and a dub soundtrack (in fact, you can choose one of three tracks to accompany your surf). Online orders are open to UK and European users only, and should be with you within three working days. ***www.boxfresh.co.uk***

Models.com ***www.models.com***
TheRumour ***www.therumour.com***
Salonweb ***www.salonweb.com***
Style Experts ***www.stylexperts.com***
Vogue ***www.vogue.com***

<TELEVISION>
Top shows
Big Breakfast ***bigbreakfast.channel4.com***
Brookside ***www.brookie.com***
EastEnders ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders***
Friends ***friends.warnerbros.com***
Hollyoaks ***www.hollyoaks.com***
The League of Gentlemen ***www.roystonvasey.co.uk***



Neighbours ***www.neighbours.com***
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? ***www.phone-a-friend.com***

TV companies
BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk***
Channel Four ***www.channel4.co.uk***
Channel Five ***www.channel5.co.uk***
ITV ***www.itv.co.uk***
ONdigital ***www.ondigital.co.uk***
Sky ***www.sky.co.uk***

<TRAVEL>
Airlines
Air Canada ***www.aircanada.ca***
Air France ***www.airfrance.com***
American Airlines ***www.aa.com***
Britannia ***www.britanniaairways.com***
BA ***www.british-airways.com***
BM ***www.iflybritishmidland.com***
Buzz ***www.buzzaway.com***
Continental ***www.flycontinental.com***
Easy Jet ***www.easyjet.com***
Go ***www.go-fly.com***
Iberia ***www.iberia.com***
KLM ***www.klmuk.com***
Lufthansa ***www.lufthansa.com***
Qantas ***www.qantas.com.au***
Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***
United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Atlantic Airways ***www.virgin-atlantic.co.uk***

Destination guides
Amsterdam ***www.channels.nl***
Australia ***australia-online.com***
Bargainholidays ***www.bargainholidays.com***
Caribbean Islands ***www.gopelican.com***
Cheaperholidays ***www.cheaperholidays.com***
France ***www.franceway.com***
Germany ***www.germany-tourism.de***
Greece ***www.gogreece.com***
India ***www.indiagov.org***
Italy ***www.travel.it***
Ireland ***www.12travel.co.uk***
Japan ***www.jnto.go.jp***
Spain ***www.red2000.com***
UK ***www.exploreukland.co.uk***
US ***www.go-unitedstates.com***

Ferries
Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.poef.com/poef/index.htm***
Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***
Travel.World ***www.travel.world.co.uk/ferries.htm***
UK Camp Site ***ukcampsite.co.uk***

Rail travel
Euro Railways ***www.eurorailways.com***
Great Eastern Railway ***www.ger.co.uk***
Great Western Trains ***www.great-western-trains.co.uk***
Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport Information ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

Travel agents
Airtickets ***www.airtickets.co.uk***
Bargain Holidays ***www.bargainholidays.org***
Biztravel ***www.biztravel.com***
Usit Campus ***www.usitcampus.co.uk***
ebookers ***www.ebookers.com***
Expedia ***www.expedia.co.uk***
Holiday Deals ***www.holidaydeals.com***
Holiday Wizard ***www.holidaywizard.co.uk***
Internet Travel ***www.itsnet.co.uk***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
STA Travel ***www.statravel.co.uk***
First Resort ***www.thefirstresort.com***
Thomas Cook ***www.thomascook.co.uk***
Thomson ***www.thomson-holidays.com***
Trailfinders ***www.trailfinder.com***
Travel Choice ***www.travelchoice.co.uk***

<WEBCAMS>
Directories
Allcam ***www.allcam.com***
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Digital Camera Network ***www.dcn.com***
Webcam Central ***www.camcentral.com***
WebCam World ***www.webcamworld.com***
Webviews ***www.webviews.co.uk***

Our Favourites
AfriCam ***www.africam.com***
Jennicam ***www.jennicam.org***
Ultimate Taxi ***www.ultimatetaxi.com***
Howletts Zoo ***howletts.net***
WalfordCam ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/webcam/index.shtml***

<WEB CENSORS>
Cybersnoop ***www.pearlsw.com***
Cyber Patrol ***www.cyberpatrol.com***
Net Nanny ***www.netnanny.com***
Xcheck ***www.xcheck.net***

<WEB DIRECTORIES>
About.com ***www.about.com***
4anything ***www.4anything.com***
AOL Netfind ***www.aol.com/netfind***
Excite ***www.excite.com***
Infoseek ***infoseek.go.com***
Liszt (mailing lists) ***www.liszt.com***
LookSmart ***www.looksmart.com***
Open Directory ***www.dmoz.org***
Thomson ***www.thomweb.co.uk***
WebCrawler ***www.webcrawler.com***
Yahoo! ***www.yahoo.com***
Yell ***www.yell.co.uk***

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You'll be able to win prizes every week, OR, if you want to see your name up in lights – build up your total score over the season – to become the undisputed 'Football Brain Of Britain 2001', and pick up a cheque for £2,500.

Terms and conditions apply, see online for details.

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freeserve
www.freeserve.com

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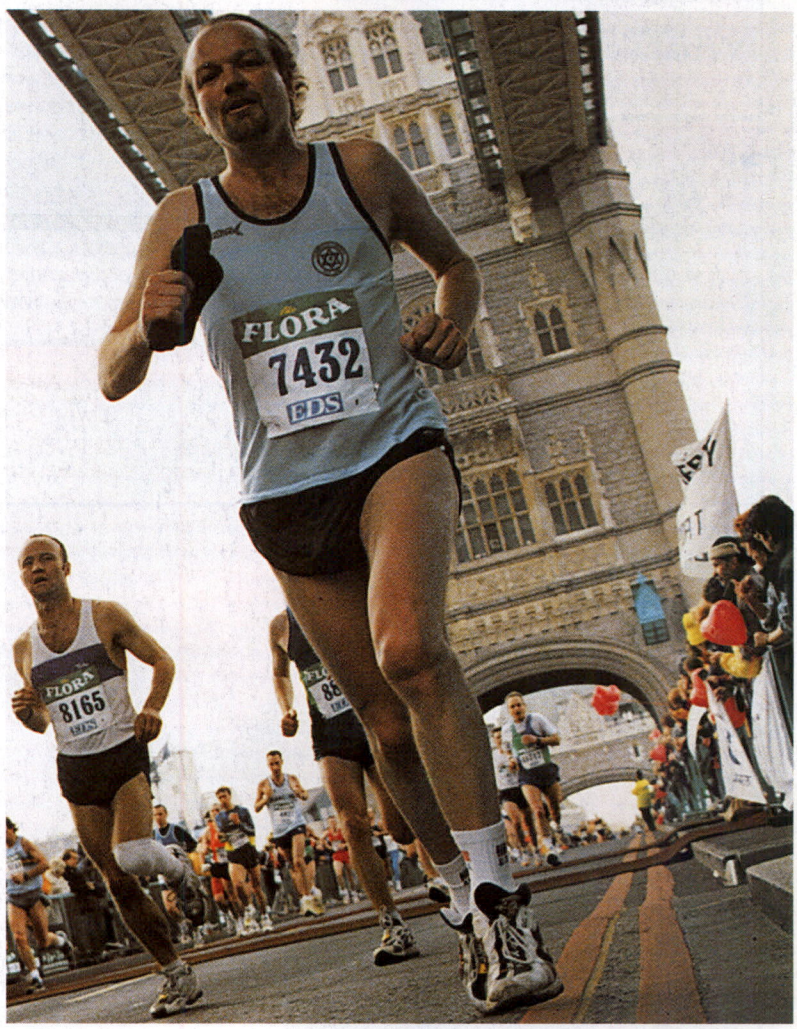
Let Freeserve train you for the London Marathon



Your daily Web fix in one place

No. 1 for the Internet

All you need to make the most of the Web

Keep in touchdown

Use your WAP phone to get all the latest rugby results

Valentine's Day

Make that special day go with a bang

16 pages that will change the way you use the Internet

Welcome

Welcome to Freeserve, the UK's No. 1 for the Internet. Whatever you want from the Internet, you can find it on Freeserve. Our content is the best you can get, covering all the topics you could want to read about. Whether you like shopping, travel, sport or chat, you'll find all these and much, much more on Freeserve Today at *www.freeserve.com*. Freeserve is the Internet's leader for great content, but that's not all. Over 2 million people are currently online as members of the nation's most popular Internet Service Provider (ISP) and portal – they're all part of one big community who enjoy the many benefits of being a Freeserve member.

What you'll get from Freeserve

Free Internet calls

It's fair to say that everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some people use the Internet at work or at college, others spend hours on the Internet at home. Still more will log on for a couple of minutes a few times a day. At Freeserve we offer you a choice of Internet call packages, putting you in control of your access charges. It works like this: No Ties Freeserve Time lets you pay as you use, charging a local rate per minute you stay online. Or there's Freeserve HomeTime, which gives you unmetered access from 6pm until 8am during the week and all day at weekends. And Freeserve AnyTime allows you free Internet calls at all times for just £12.99. See ***www.freeserve.com/time*** for more information on all these packages.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, the new high-speed Broadband service for both homes and businesses. FreeservePlus for home works on a 'flat-fee' basis of just £39.99 per month plus a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details, see ***www.freeserve.com/plus***.

Email

Imagine what it must be like to receive post at any time of the day or night, within seconds of when it was sent. Well, that's exactly how email works. And with Freeserve, you don't have to pay a penny. When you sign up, you'll get an unlimited number of free email addresses. Messages are free to send and receive; all you pay is the cost of the Internet connection call.

And now you have even more choice, thanks to FSmail, our Web-based email service. You can check it anywhere in the world – all you need is an Internet terminal! For more information, see ***www.fsmail.net***.

Communication options

With email, there's always the danger that you might need to read your messages when you don't have access to a computer. Now that needn't be a problem – if you have an mobile Internet phone (also called a WAP phone) you can use it to retrieve your Freeserve email and to browse some parts of the Internet, so you can stay up to date with all the latest news and sports results even while you're on the move. See ***www.freeserve.com/mobile***

Talking email

And then there's Speechmail. This clever voice-activated service lets you access your email messages over the phone. And as you would expect, there's no subscription charge for Freeserve members.

To access the service, simply sign up at the address below. You'll be given a PIN and a phone number which you can ring from any phone to hear your emails read to you. You can then tell the service to delete, forward or save your emails. So no matter how important the message, you won't need to sit in front of a computer screen to receive it. ***www.freeserve.com/communications***

Web space

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are that you'll be keen to build your own site. Well, now that's easy, thanks to some great benefits you'll receive as a Freeserve member.

We'll give you a massive 15 Megabytes of free space in which to create your own Web site. You can make your site about absolutely anything that you like – it can be dedicated

All the family can enjoy Freeserve

CHANNEL GUIDE

Some of the great channels available on Freeserve

Today

Freeserve has always striven to provide the best content on the Web, and the Today channel has been styled to present an exciting and enjoyable mix of topical content and features. Go there today! ***www.freeserve.com***

Auctions

The thrill of bidding for items to get them at bargain prices is no longer confined to auction rooms. By going to FSauctions at ***www.fsauctions.co.uk*** you can peruse the wide variety of merchandise on offer and place your bid. It's up to you to decide how high to go!

to your favourite pop star, football team or even yourself!

And the wealth of free software on the Freeserve sign-up CD makes it easy to get your site up and running.

So with help from Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.

Great content

At Freeserve we don't just strive to bring you free Web space, unlimited free email addresses and a choice of Internet access packages. We're also dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all under one roof: on the Freeserve Today page at *www.freeserve.com*.

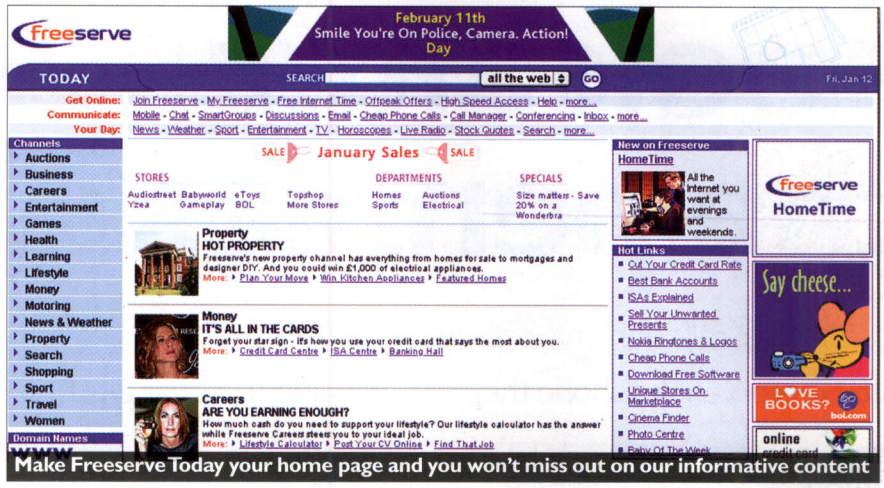
To make the most of Today, make it your home page on the Web and check it every day to get a fantastic digest of all the latest news, weather and sport just as it happens. You can even customise the Today page to suit your personal interests and then explore events more thoroughly on the relevant channels, of which there are many.

Freeserve for life

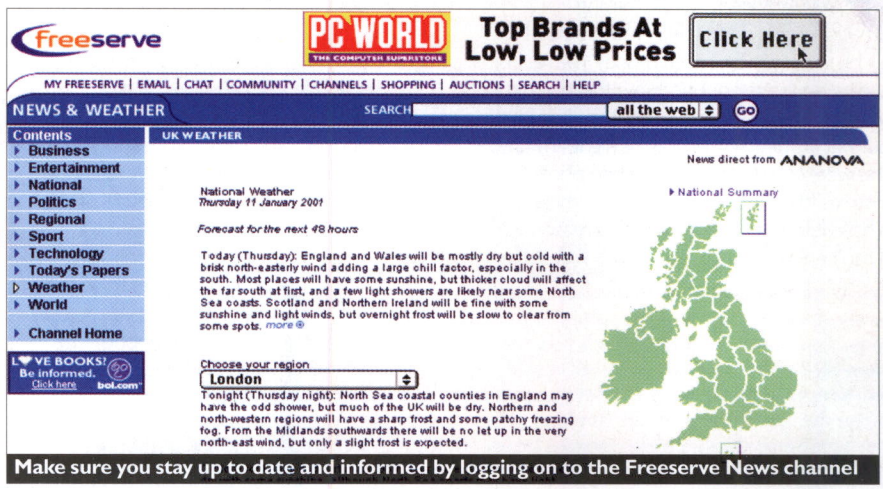
Freeserve isn't limited to hard news. Try the feature-packed Lifestyle channel, follow the stars with the Entertainment channel, plan a holiday with the Travel channel or get talking on our Chat channel. If you have a small business, you shouldn't miss the Business channel. There are also Sport, Learning and Money channels, as well as the women's channel at iCircle.com.

Finally, our email newsletter will keep you up-to-date with all that's going on at Freeserve.

www.freeserve.com



Make Freeserve Today your home page and you won't miss out on our informative content

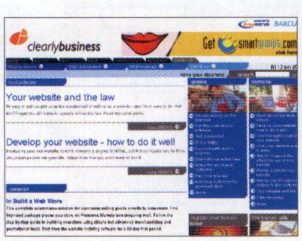


Make sure you stay up to date and informed by logging on to the Freeserve News channel

Sign up online at *www.freeserve.com* or pick up the Freeserve installation CD at Dixons, Currys, PC World or The Link. It's free!

Business

Whether you've got an established business or are a newcomer, Clearlybusiness.com, backed by both Freeserve and Barclays, can help. Get your business online for a prosperous year!

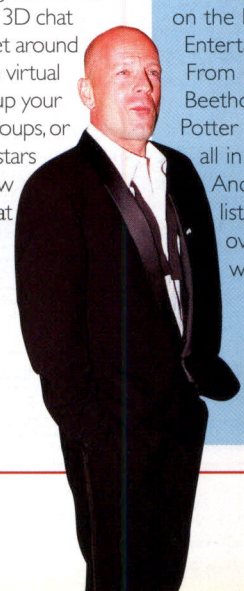


Careers

You're wired – now get hired, not fired! The Careers channel lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide. You can apply online, or submit your CV and wait for employers in your area to come to you!

Chat

Our ever-popular chat service is a great hit. You can use our 3D chat rooms to get around and explore virtual worlds, set up your own chat groups, or chat to the stars with our new celebrity chat section.



Entertainment

The latest film and music releases can all be found on the Freeserve Entertainment channel. From Bruce Willis to Beethoven and Harry Potter to *Hollyoaks*, it's all in Entertainment. And now you can listen to the radio over the Web as well!

Health

The Freeserve Health channel will help you stay in tip-top condition. The channel is packed full of information and advice on everything from herbal medicine to the latest medical breakthroughs.

Image Bank; Newmakers

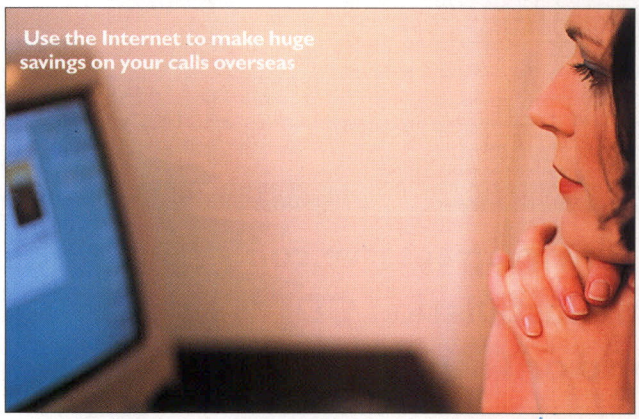
powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

Look after the pennies

International calls don't have to cost the earth; with Freeserve Webphone they can cost next to nothing!

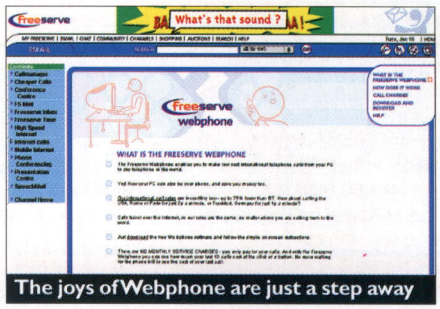
Do you have friends or family who live overseas? Perhaps your small business regularly depends on making international calls during peak-rate hours? If so, you'll be wary of how much money you're spending on the telephone. How, then, would you like to be able to call the USA for just 2p a minute, at any time of the day or night, any day of the week? Germany for the same price? Or Christmas Island, maybe, for just 5p a minute? If you have Internet access, there's no reason why you can't enjoy rates like these with Freeserve Webphone, which allows you to make really cheap international calls – up to 95 percent cheaper than BT call rates – to any telephone in over 200 countries all over the world, from Afghanistan to Antarctica, from France to Fiji.

Freeserve Webphone is like having a telephone in your PC. You use a headset or a microphone with speakers to talk into your PC and, in the same way as an ordinary telephone, Webphone converts your voice into a signal, sends it down the wires and back into the sound of your voice at the telephone you're calling (the person you're calling can receive your call on a regular phone). The main difference between Webphone and an ordinary telephone is that Webphone sends the signals through the Internet.



Use the Internet to make huge savings on your calls overseas

Using Webphone is easy. Once you've connected to the Internet, you just double-click on the phone icon on your PC screen and Webphone will appear. Then you just type in the number you're calling and enjoy your call without the worry of running up an exorbitant phone bill!



The joys of Webphone are just a step away

You can check the full list of rates for Freeserve Webphone by going to Call Charges on the Webphone site at ***www.freeserve.com/communications/webphone***, and check the rate in different international currencies, too – you can use Webphone from any country in the world, which is invaluable if your job takes you overseas. Friends and family outside the UK can also download the necessary software to call you at home for just 2p a minute, wherever they're calling from! And even if you need to use Webphone a lot, there's no need to worry about the size of the phone bill dropping on your virtual doormat – you can keep a close eye on your bill by checking the cost of your last ten calls at any time, with just one click of your mouse.

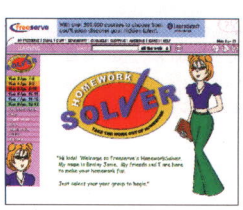
It's completely free to register for Webphone and to download the software, and there's no monthly charge – all you pay for is the cost of the call! You'll need some basic software in order to use Webphone, but most computers with Internet access will have this. To find out more about Webphone and download the Webphone software, go to ***www.freeserve.com/communications/webphone***. If you don't want to spend more than you have to on international calls, then using Freeserve Webphone is the obvious choice.

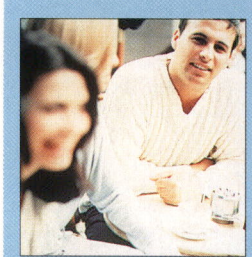
CHANNEL GUIDE

Some of the great channels available on Freeserve

Learning

From SATS right through to A-level, Freeserve Learning is there to help you through your studies with an interactive environment to encourage learning skills. And now it's possible to take an online course, thanks to BlueU.



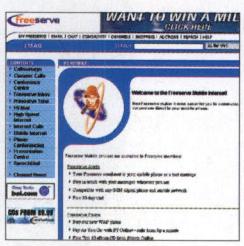


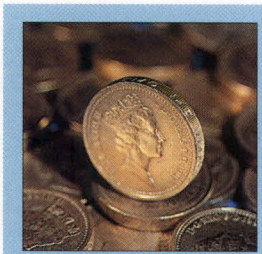
Lifestyle

The Lifestyle channel is an exclusive features magazine which brings you the latest on every-thing that matters in the way you live, online and off. Whatever you're into, you'll enjoy Lifestyle.

Mobile

Make the most of your mobile phone with some great features on the Freeserve Mobile zone, including WAP and the opportunity to personalise your phone with ringtones and icons.



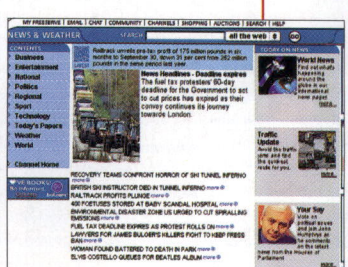


Money

Freeserve will help you keep your finances healthy with expert advice. Whether you want savings tips, a mortgage or advice on choosing an ISA, you can keep your pocket full with Freeserve.

News

Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb news service. You'll get all the latest stories, together with business news and a complete rundown of headlines as they happen.



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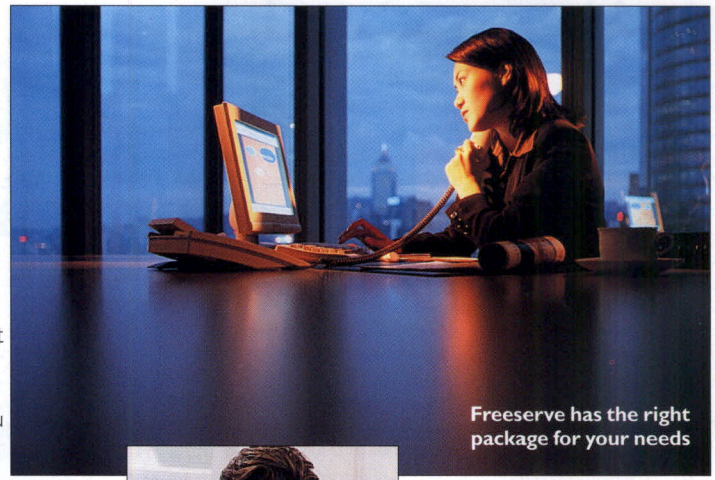
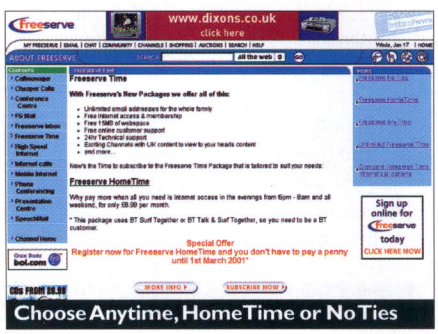
Suits you

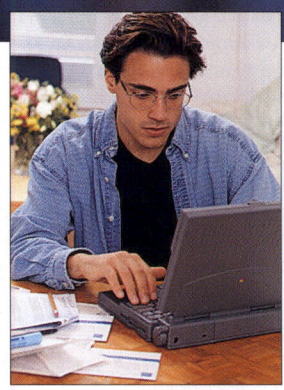
Don't pay more than you have to for the Web – choose the Freeserve package that suits you


Freeserve has the right package for your needs

If you or your family are at home during the week and regularly use the Internet, you'll probably be concerned about the size of your monthly phone bill, as many ISPs (Internet Service Providers) charge a premium rate for calls to the Internet made between 8am and 6pm on weekdays. But with Freeserve Anytime you pay just £12.99 a month for free calls to the Internet, day or night, 24 hours a day, any day of the week, and then all your calls to the Internet are absolutely free of charge. For anyone who uses the Internet more than eight hours a month at peak-rate times, this package is ideal. It's the cheapest flat-rate package available from any ISP. As soon as you've registered, at ***www.freeserve.com/time***, your Anytime package will be ready and you can go ahead and enjoy the complete freedom to surf whenever you want. Imagine: you won't even have to think about how long you're surfing for; just pay the monthly fee and you can go online whenever you want, with no extra charges.



Choose Anytime, HomeTime or No Ties



But some people only use the Internet in the evenings, perhaps just surfing to unwind after work, or as a study aid if you've homework or private research to do. In which case you'll want a package that reflects your off-peak usage, in the same way that telephone calls are cheaper in the evening than they are in the day. If you're a BT user, you'll be able to benefit from the great deal which Freeserve HomeTime offers. HomeTime works in conjuction with BT SurfTogether or BT Surf and Talk Together. You simply pay a flat monthly charge on top of your normal BT bill to get free calls to the Internet between 6pm and 8am during the week and all day at the weekend. You can register for HomeTime, at ***www.freeserve.com/time***, as soon as you've signed up with BT. Using HomeTime means you'll never have to worry about how long the kids, yourself or any other family members are on the Internet in the evenings.

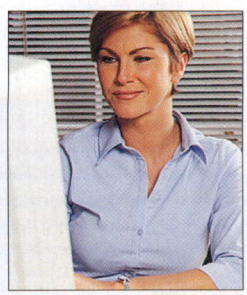
Of course, not everyone knows when they're next going to need to use the Internet, and some people only use it from time to time – perhaps to check emails, buy presents or book a holiday online – and at any time of day. If you use the Internet for, say, less than 10 hours a month, Freeserve No Ties will be the best package for you. With Freeserve No Ties, you simply pay for the calls to the Internet when you make them, and for nothing else! There are no monthly charges; you just pay as you go. Calls are charged at the local rate. You don't have to be with BT to use it – cable telephone users are welcome, too – but if you are with BT you can save even more by adding the Freeserve No Ties access number to your existing BT Friends and Family discount list by calling BT on 150. You can use the service as soon as you register, which you can do by going to ***www.freeserve.com/time***.

Property
Everything you'll need to look after your home and garden is on the Freeserve Property channel, from maintenance to advice on how to make moving house easier!

Shopping
At the Freeserve Shopping channel you can find a wide range of items, from flowers or food to a car or a computer. Look out for great deals and savings from SHOP@freeserve and now the new Marketplace retailers. Freeserve can also help you get your loved one just the right gift for Valentine's Day – get some great ideas from our feature on page xii

Sports
Whatever your sport, you'll find it on Freeserve. Football, tennis, cricket, rugby, motorsport, golf – you can get the results and follow your heroes on the Sports channel.

Travel
Click on the Freeserve Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide. There are always sensational last-minute deals on offer, plus weekend breaks and UK holidays as well as flights, hotels and care hire – all you need to find the perfect holiday!



Women
Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, iCircle.com, for the latest features, information and advice.

Empics; Image Bank; Retna

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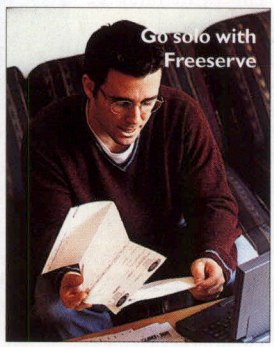
Life as a soloist

Journalist and PR Consultant Anne Massey reveals the ups and downs of running your own business

The common idea is that people deliberately leave large companies to fulfil their dream and start their own business. But in reality, many people fall into self-employment by accident. My husband went freelance to stay home and look after our baby and found he had more work than he could cope with, so I joined him and we formed a partnership producing magazines and newspapers until we divorced about 15 years later – be warned, it's not easy to work together and keep romance alive. Then I really went solo.

For me, the very worst thing is dealing with late payment. I invoice promptly but most companies take as long as they can to pay up. And when you're on your own, it can be lonely. There's no one to pass the buck to, bounce ideas off or help you make difficult decisions. You have to work even when you're ill because there's no one to delegate to. Then there's the boredom of having to source and pay your own pension and public liability insurance – not to mention having to do the dreaded VAT return yourself!

It's difficult sometimes, but working for myself means I earn more. I also don't have to travel to work, I set my own priorities and make my own decisions. And now that I've built a reputation for myself, I am able to command higher fees. I can't imagine ever going back to being employed by someone else!


Go solo with Freeserve

Get your business off the ground with Clearlybusiness

If, like Anne, you want to start your own business, Clearlybusiness.com, the small business Web site backed by Freeserve and Barclays, can help. To get you started, read our top 10 tips on turning your idea into reality.

1 **Have you got what it takes?** Take a free test on Clearlybusiness to find out whether you have the right personality to go it alone.

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2 **Understand your market.** It is essential that you know the market you are about to enter. Clearlybusiness can give you access to reports covering over 200 industry sectors, including information about your competition.

3 **Plan ahead.** Clearlybusiness provides articles and advice on all areas, from finding the right suppliers to promoting and selling your product.

4 **Seek advice.** Clearlybusiness Community enables you to get real answers to your business questions online and gain from the experience of people who have already been where you are.

5 **Get the right legal form.** Are you going to be a sole trader, a partnership or a limited company? We can help you weigh up the pros and cons of each and assist you through the whole process of registering your company as well as providing you with all the necessary documentation to start trading.

6 **Get your finance right.** Financial planning is a core component of a new business. Clearlybusiness can advise you on financial projections and further funding. It's best to use a bank that can offer specialised business services. Find your nearest Barclays Small Business Team with our online locator.

NEW ON FREESERVE

Check out some of our great new features

Getting the most out of your email

These days, there are so many different ways to get in touch that we are constantly giving out several contact details for people to reach us – phone numbers, fax numbers or email addresses. You then have to retrieve your communications from several different sources, which can be time consuming and inconvenient. With Freeserve Inbox, however, you can save on breath and effort by giving out just one number for your faxes and voice mails, both of which get delivered to your existing Freeserve email account. When you sign up for Inbox, at ***www.freeserve.com/inbox***, you are given a personal 0870 number which acts as a virtual fax and answering machine. You can then check for messages anywhere you can log on to the Internet. And, as with your emails, your PC doesn't need to be switched on to receive voice mails or faxes, which means you don't have to be disturbed by them when they come in. Because Inbox is part of your personal Freeserve email account, your messages are kept safe from prying eyes or ears – unlike a regular fax or answering machine. Just don't forget to tell everyone about your new fax and voice mail number – it needn't take long if you send a group email.

Get ahead of the game

There's plenty to feed games addicts in Freeserve Games, at ***www.freeserve.com/games***. Read news and reviews of all the latest games, then consult other fanatics in a forum or SmartGroup before buying your chosen game online; you can buy consoles and accessories too, and if you need any help a virtual shop assistant will be there to help you. With Gameplay Mobile you can access the latest gaming news and views from your mobile internet (or WAP) phone. Then play online or pick up some cheating tips to make sure you're ahead of the game!

Get up to speed with your gaming

7 Get the resources you need. Will you be working from home, or do you need premises? Do you plan to employ other people? Clearlybusiness can help you with a commercial property search, and the virtual HR department provides all the services you'll need to meet your personnel needs.

8 Make the most of technology. Clearlybusiness can help you get to grips with issues such as communication technology, and how to find the right equipment at the right price.

9 Simplify your tax. Clearlybusiness can advise you on the minefield of tax, and the fortnightly newsletter will keep you updated with changes to the tax system and other legislation that will affect your business.

10 Build your business profile. Success in business is not simply about having a great product idea; good marketing is essential. Clearlybusiness has advice on getting the right marketing plan, how to buy advertising efficiently and how to get your business on the Web.

This is just a taster of the information and resources available from Clearlybusiness. To see how you can get your business off the ground and keep it there, visit *www.clearlybusiness.com*.

clearlybusiness.com

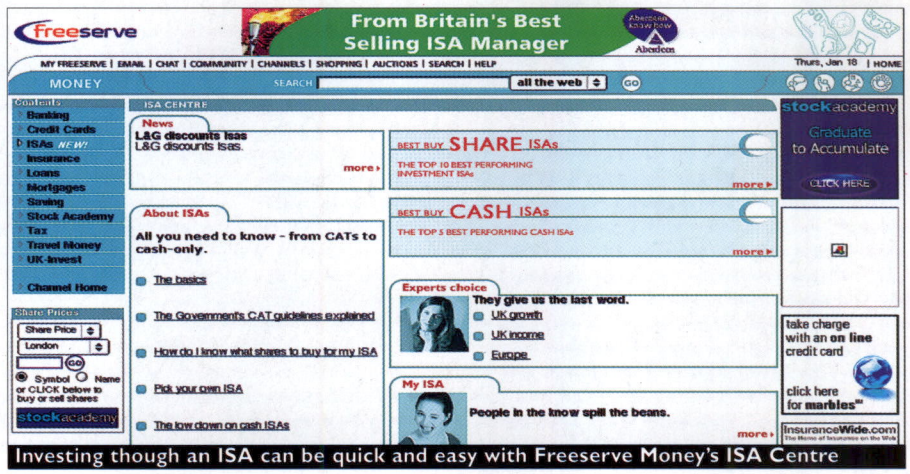
Money matters

Protect your hard-earned cash with an ISA from Freeserve

With just two months left before the end of the current tax year, time is of the essence for those wanting to hide their hard-earned cash from the clutches of the Inland Revenue. The best way to do this is through an Individual Savings Account, or ISA. Freeserve Money's ISA Centre, at *www.freeserve.com/money/isacentre*, is just the ticket if time is as important to you as money. If you're new to buying ISAs, you'll find all the information you'll need to teach yourself about them – from the basics of tax-free saving to the complexities of UK income funds. And if you're an experienced ISA saver then we have everything for you to work out the best returns.

Still trying to decide whether to invest in an ISA? You can read about other ISA savers who've really benefited from it.

You should also take a look at our online banking hall at *www.freeserve.com/money/banking*. And if Christmas left your wallet needing a holiday, then chances are you're considering taking out a loan to pay off your debts. But the last thing you want is to end up with an expensive loan which means you have to cough up more interest. Use our loan finder, at *www.freeseve.com/money/loans*, to scour the market for the best deals. Let Freeserve take care of your money worries by going to *www.freeserve.com/money*.



Investing though an ISA can be quick and easy with Freeserve Money's ISA Centre

Stay online and in touch

The fact that you can get online using your existing telephone line is great if you want to avoid the trouble and expense of getting a separate line installed, but it has the disadvantage of stopping anyone from calling you while you're using the Internet. That is, unless you use Freeserve Call Manager, at *www.freeserve.com/callmanager*. This great new service tells you when someone is trying to get through to you on the phone by flashing up an icon on your PC screen, and if you've entered their name and number in the address book, Call Manager can even tell you who's calling. You can then decide whether to take the call, either by diverting it to a fixed or mobile telephone or by transferring it to your PC, where you can take the call by wearing a headset. Alternatively, Call Manager can take a message or play a greeting recorded by you, asking the caller to try again later. If your friends also have Call Manager, Call Manager Alert will let you know when they're online, allowing you to voice-chat to them using VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol), costing you the same as a local call, no matter where in the world they are. Call Manager is subscription-free; you just pay 10p per minute for calls to be diverted to another number.

House-hunting made easy

With spring just around the corner, now is a good time to make a fresh start and look for that new home. House-hunting doesn't have to be a nightmare, and Freeserve Property, at *www.freeserve.com/property*, can help it go smoothly, from start to finish. Search the extensive property database to find what you want, then, using the calculator to find out what you can afford and how much you'll need to pay, find the right mortgage with help from the Freeserve Mortgage Centre, provided by Charcoal Online. Once you've moved in, let Freeserve weed out the cowboys and find reliable interior designers and decorators to make your dream of a new home come true.

Happy house-hunting with Freeserve

Retina

Run for their lives

Freeserve will show you how to get fit for the London Marathon and raise money for the NSPCC

At 9am on Sunday, 22 April, over 30,000 runners from all over the world will feel a rush of adrenalin as they surge forward together to begin the 20th London Marathon, sponsored by Flora. The full 26-mile course can make for a gruelling experience as it winds back and forth across London, from Blackheath in the south-east to The Mall near Buckingham Palace. And not everyone manages to complete it, despite the encouragement and support of the crowd.

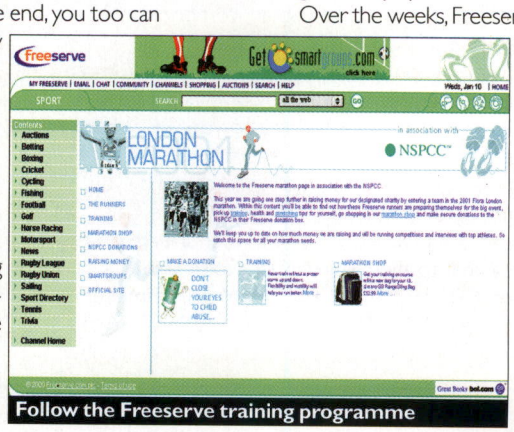
Many runners take part not to win, but simply to raise money for charity. And with some wearing crazy fancy dress to bring attention to their chosen cause, the race is equally well known for its happy atmosphere and sense of community. This year the competitors will include a team from Freeserve who are running to raise money for the NSPCC, which needs a total of £250 million for its Full Stop campaign.

Of course, the closest most of us will have come to actually getting involved in the London Marathon is six feet away from the television set. Sitting watching the highlights from the comfort of our favourite armchair, the idea of being fit enough to run even a fraction of the course seems impossibly out of reach!

But with the help of the new Freeserve London Marathon site at ***www.freeserve.com/sport/marathon***, in association with the NSPCC, there's absolutely no reason why you can't cross the finish line of the world's biggest marathon yourself. If just a little part of you envies the look of triumph on the faces of those who complete the course, or the sheer thrill of taking part experienced by those who don't quite get to the end, you too can participate and enjoy the same sense of elation at having achieved something you never imagined you could.

Whether you're completely new to long-distance running and just want the satisfaction of being able to say you finished the course, or you're a regular runner and want to finish in a good time (about three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours), the Freeserve London Marathon site provides a training programme to suit your needs so you can achieve your goal. The full programmes last from 14 to 16 weeks, but to make sure you're ready by April 22nd you can skip three or four weeks in the schedule or modify parts of it depending on your rate of progress; it's important, however, not to push yourself too fast or you might risk injury.

Over the weeks, Freeserve will guide you, leading you from a fairly gentle routine for your personal standard – jogging and rambling for beginners, longer and faster stints for more experienced runners – to increasingly rigorous training so that you're fully prepared by the big day. You'll be amazed how



Follow the Freeserve training programme

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much you can achieve with the right guidance. Beginners can expect to manage an eight-mile run in under two months of training; by week 11 of the programme, serious runners will be running 20 miles in under three hours!

Towards the end of the programme, you can pick up some top tips from expert endurance runner Bruce Tulloh so that you can keep training right up until the big day without sustaining injury. And there's a list of training tips which you can use throughout the programme: however obvious it might seem, it's always useful to be reminded that running with others

NSPCC™

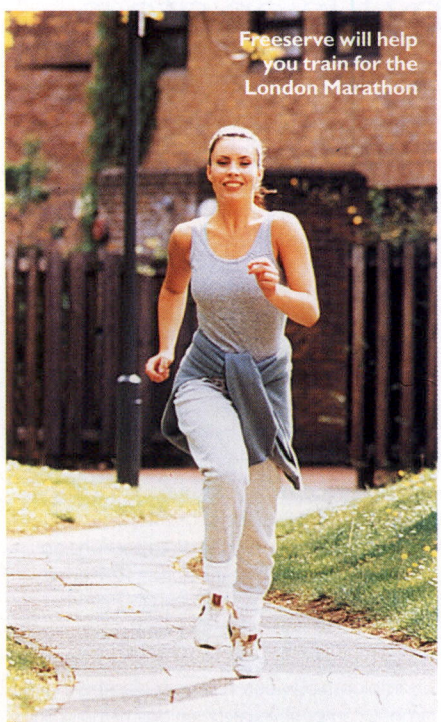
Run and raise money for the NSPCC

You'll be amazed how much you can achieve with the right guidance

is a more effective and fun way of training for a race than running on your own, or that you should have more than one pair of worn-in running shoes in case one gets wet.

The site also features a selection of important stretching excercises to make sure you're always sufficiently warmed up before you start training. If you need any extra pieces of kit, the Marathon Shop will take you to the Sports and Leisure area of the Freeserve Shopping channel for a great range of sportswear. You can also check out the official London Marathon Web site, which includes all the information you might need to participate – everything from the course map to accommodation. You can also join the Freeserve London Marathon Smartgroup, a virtual meeting place where marathon runners of all standards can discuss any aspect of the race.

If you still need inspiration to get to your feet and start running, you can read about the 11 members of the Freeserve team who are running to raise money for the NSPCC's Full Stop campaign. Launched in March 1999, the campaign aims to put an end to all cruelty towards children – which affects many thousands of infants and young people in the UK every year. By getting friends, family and colleagues to sponsor you by donating a lump sum for your participation or a set amount for every mile you complete, you too can help to dramatically improve the lives of children all over the UK, giving them easy and confidential access to help and safety.



Freeserve will help you train for the London Marathon

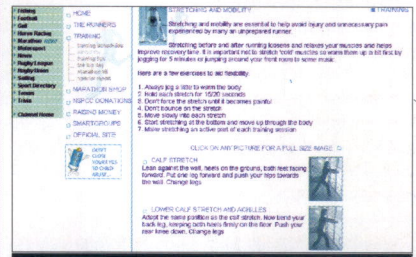
The Freeserve London Marathon site also includes plenty of suggestions on how to make the most of your fundraising, such as by publicising your efforts by getting yourself mentioned on local radio or in the local newspaper; by sending a round robin email to everyone you know to ask them to sponsor you, or by getting friends or colleagues to organise their own fundraising event to add to the amount you raise on your own. A karaoke night or a pub quiz is an ideal way to raise money for charity while having a great night out! Be sure to get a friend to take a photo of you before, after and during the race – collecting your sponsor money will be much easier when you've got evidence of your hard work to hand.

If you're unable to take part in the Marathon yourself for any reason, you can always make an online donation of any size to the NSPCC by clicking on the smiling collecting tin icon on the Freeserve London Marathon NSPCC Donations page. Or you can show your support by sponsoring one of the Freeserve runners – choose from their profiles on the site.

You don't have to run the marathon to benefit from the Freeserve London Marthon site's training progamme – it's a great way to get fit quick at any time of the year. But if you do take up the challenge, you'll find it one of the most rewarding experiences of your life, in terms of both your own physical achievements and the knowledge that, by using your physical efforts to raise money for charity, you can make a vital difference to someone else's life. Just go to *www.freeserve.com/sport/marathon* and let Freeserve guide you on your way!

Top training tips
to get you to the finish line

1 **ALWAYS WARM UP AND STRETCH** before you run – even if you're only going for a jog



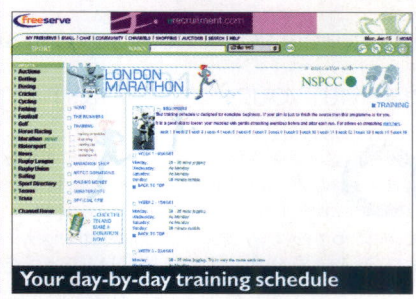
Use the stretching guide to avoid injury

2 **DRESS APPROPRIATELY**
Be seen, be safe and be warm

3 **TRY TO RUN WITH OTHERS**
It helps motivation

4 **DRINK PLENTY OF WATER**
You should drink four to five litres a day as long as you're training

5 **KEEP A TRAINING LOG**
to monitor your progress and aid motivation



Your day-by-day training schedule

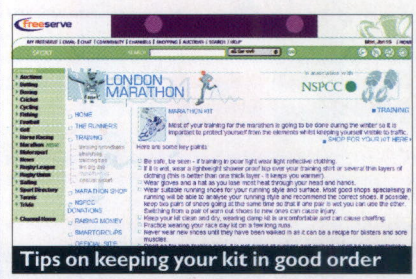
6 **BE SAFE** Always tell someone where you're training and when you expect to return

7 **RUN OFF ROAD OCCASIONALLY** to give your body a break from the jarring tarmac

8 **DON'T IGNORE INJURIES**
They'll need special attention if they're to heal in time for the race

9 **IF YOU'RE ILL, DON'T RUN**
Wait until you feel better

10 **ENJOY YOUR RUNNING**
Don't over-do it!



Tips on keeping your kit in good order

Richard Lawrence; Retna; Sporting Pictures UK

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Follow the score

BTcellnet

It's unlikely you'll be able to watch every game in this year's Six Nations Rugby Championship, but with your Mobile Internet phone you'll always be able to find out the score from Freeserve

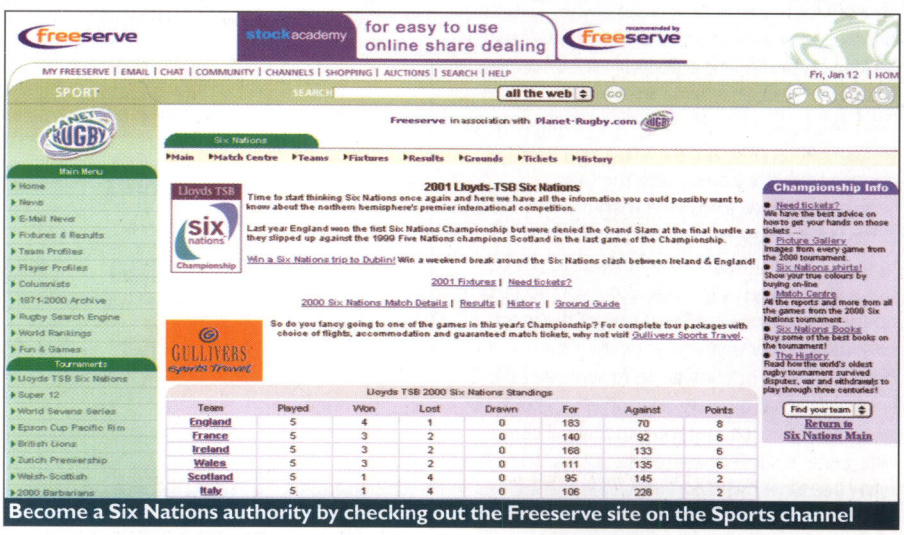
Over the next few weeks, serious rugby union fans will probably be finding it difficult to concentrate at work; at home, too, they may start to behave strangely; out with mates, they will appear possessed. And possessed they will be, to some extent, because until 8 April one event will take over a large part of their lives: the 2001 Six Nations Championship (sponsored by Lloyds TSB), the most significant set of games in the rugby union calendar.

As the weeks progress, anyone following the games will be on tenterhooks as they wait to find out which country looks set to scoop the most points and if a Grand Slam seems on the cards; last year's overall winners England narrowly missed it, with Scotland denying them the triumph by beating them in the very last game.

The Freeserve Rugby Union site is chock full of facts and comment

In between cheering for their favourite teams when watching the matches on television or listening to commentators' ecstatic accounts on the radio, rugby fans can indulge their passion for rugby union by visiting the Freeserve Rugby Union site on the Sports channel at *www.freeserve.com/sport*. The site is chock full of facts and comment on rugby union (there's also a site for rugby league fans to get stuck into). With the full list of upcoming matches – both international and inter-club – to put in your diary, including details of the host city and kick-off time where available, fans will always know when to check the site for the results as well as the latest rugby news. There are profiles of all 20 teams who played in the 1999 Rugby World Cup and of almost 10,000 current and former players. Real fanatics will love the amazing search archive, which contains details of international players, matches and results from 1871-2000! You can also read contributions by some of the top rugby columnists including England captain Martin Johnson.

Needless to say, in addition to sections on championships such as the Super 12, Zurich Premiership and the Heinkeken Cup, the Freeserve Rugby Union site includes an amazingly detailed site for the Six Nations Championship, widely recognised as the most famous competitive rugby union championship



Become a Six Nations authority by checking out the Freeserve site on the Sports channel

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in the world. It began in 1882 as the Four Nations, a tournament between England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales; but after France joined the fray in 1910 it remained best known as the Five Nations until last year, when Italy brought the number of participating nations up to six.

Those who fancy themselves as experts or want to brush up their knowledge in order to place a safe bet on the winning team will benefit from all the statistics and reviews: you can get fully up to date with all the teams' current standings and click on the list of upcoming matches to see which of the two opposing teams got thrashed last time they met on the pitch! Pore over the reports and pictures from last year's tournament; swoon over the photos and facts about all the international stadiums, from Cardiff's Millennium Stadium to the Stade de France, Paris. Of course, at this stage in the Championship it's almost impossible to get hold of tickets to any of the matches, particularly those actually taking place in the UK, but there are still a few days left to enter the site's competition to win a weekend break to see the game between Ireland and England, held at Dublin's Lansdowne Road stadium on 24 March, which promises to be a clash of the Titans!

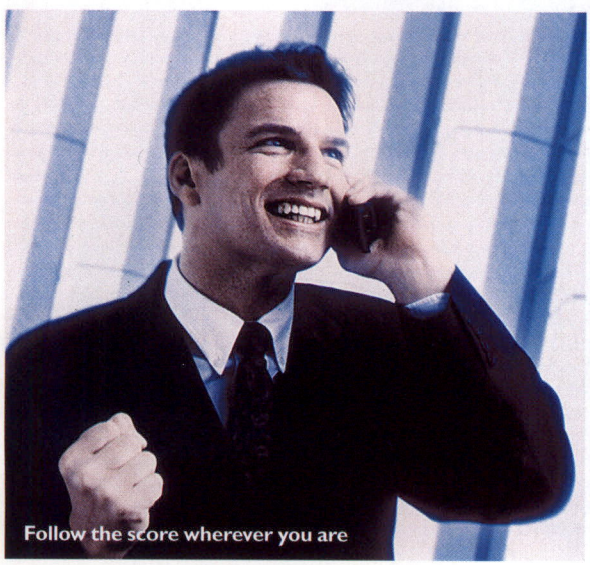
But even for the most die-hard of rugby fans, it's not always possible to see all of every game as it happens or to catch the results on the radio, and if you're out of the office or away from your computer you may not be able to access the Internet either. However, if you've got a mobile phone with WAP (Wireless Application Protocol), also known as a Mobile Internet phone, you can keep up to date with the rugby score wherever you are – on the train, in a hotel or – if you can match your obsession with your sneakiness – even during a meeting!

Although it's not yet possible to view pictures and full Web site content with your WAP phone, you can access a range of essential information such as news and weather reports as well as those all-important sporting results. Freeserve won't charge you a penny for accessing information from the site – you just pay the normal mobile rate to your network provider for as long as you are connected. You can even access the Mobile content if you're out of the country, though you'll probably have to pay more for your mobile network service.

And, if you're a Freeserve member, you can also use your WAP phone to read and reply to your email messages when you're away from your computer, so you don't have to miss out on any of the rugby talk your mates are enjoying! Even if you don't have a WAP phone, you can keep tabs on their email chat with Freeserve's Speechmail service. You just dial your allocated phone number to get your emails read to you over the phone. You can find out about all of Freeserve's mobile services, including a range of ring tones to personalise your mobile, at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*. Thanks to Freeserve you can keep completely up to date with all the latest Six Nations scores wherever you are during the Championship.

Win a signed England Rugby shirt and a WAP phone

With a WAP mobile (or Mobile Internet phone) you'll be able to keep up with the score throughout the Lloyds TSB Six Nations Championship by accessing the Internet wherever you are. For the chance to win a Siemens C35 WAP phone and an England rugby shirt signed by the team themselves courtesy of BTCellnet, visit the Freeserve competition site at *www.freeserve.com/competitions*. And if you're not lucky enough to win, you can always buy the phone, which will allow you to access a range of essential information from Freeserve. Why not visit the new Web site of Britain's No. 1 phone store The Link at *www.thelink.co.uk*, where you can also find out more about the Siemens C35 and browse the online store for a wide range of mobiles, wired-phones, fax machines and accessories.


Follow the score wherever you are

The Link

Stay on the ball

with Freeserve and your Mobile Internet phone

2001 Lloyds TSB
SIX NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP
fixtures

3 February 14:00	**Italy v Ireland** Stadio Flaminio, Rome
3 February 16:00	**Wales v England** Millennium Stadium, Cardiff
4 February 15:00	**France v Scotland** Stade de France, Paris
17 February 14:00	**Ireland v France** Lansdowne Road, Dublin
17 February 14:30	**England v Italy** Twickenham, Middlesex
17 February 16:00	**Scotland v Wales** Murrayfield, Edinburgh
3 March 14:00	**Italy v France** Stadio Flaminio, Rome
3 March 14:30	**England v Scotland** Twickenham, Middlesex
3 March 16:00	**Wales v Ireland** Millennium Stadium, Cardiff
17 March 14:00	**France v Wales** Stade de France, Paris
17 March 16:00	**Scotland v Italy** Murrayfield, Edinburgh
24 March 15:00	**Ireland v England** Lansdowne Road, Dublin
7 April 13:45	**Scotland v Ireland** Murrayfield, Edinburgh
7 April 14:30	**England v France** Twickenham, Middlesex
8 April 14:00	**Italy v Wales** Stadio Flaminio, Rome

Empics; Retna

Help is at hand

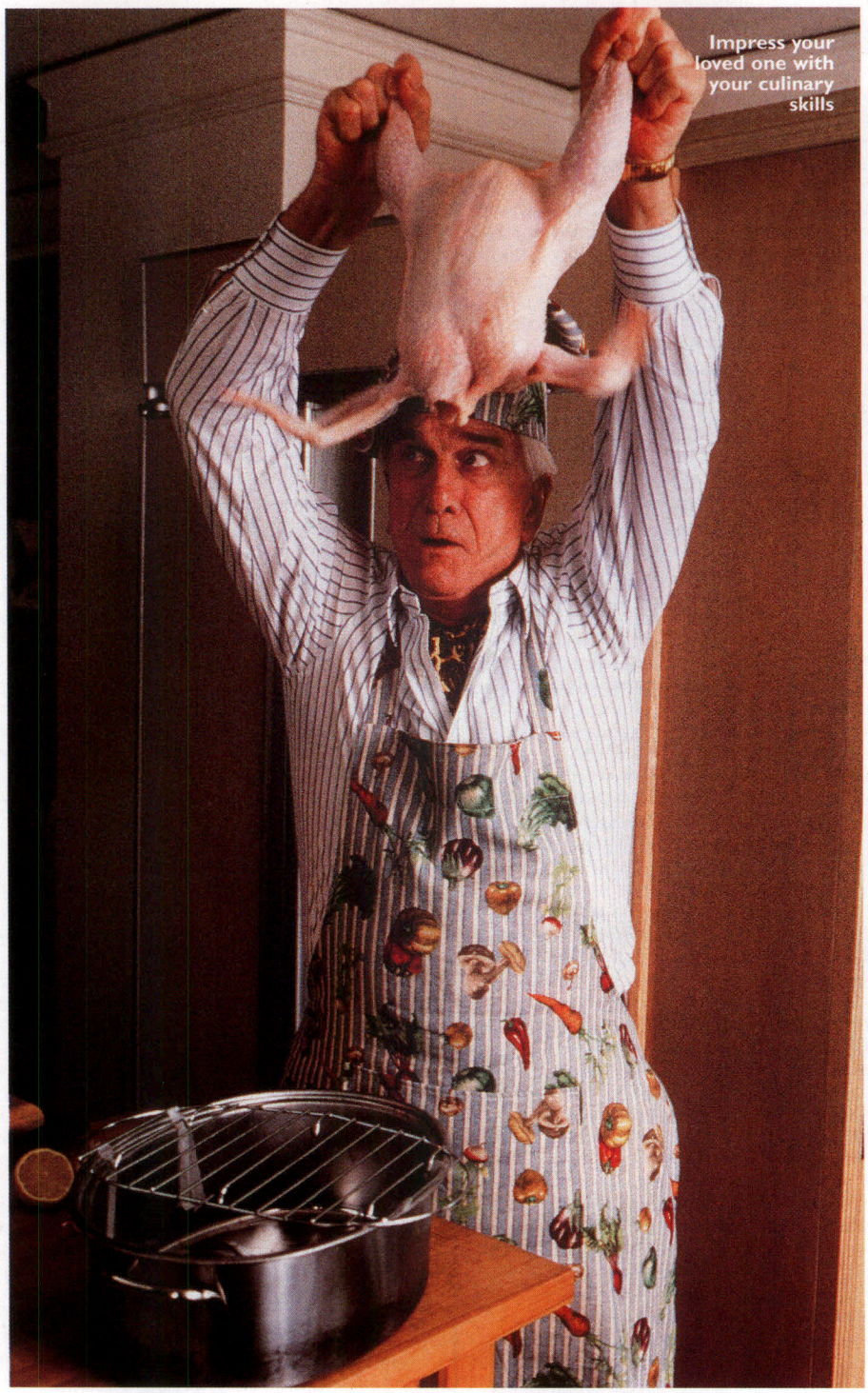
If you still haven't decided how to surprise your loved one this Valentine's Day, don't panic! Freeserve Shopping Editor Helen Loveless has some great ideas for last-minute presents

Valentine's Day is fast approaching and there's only a little time left to think of that perfect surprise for your loved one. But don't panic! Sit back, relax and let Freeserve Shopping do all the work for you. The Valentine's Shop on the Freeserve Shopping channel is designed to make sure you really are flavour of the month.

If you sometimes feel like your relationship is going nowhere, a romantic break can work wonders to rekindle the passion – or to make you realise you're not right for each other after all! At the Valentine's Shop you can find out about all the top romantic travel destinations. Book a weekend in Paris and you could be strolling by the banks of the Seine or having a meaningful moment at the top of the Eiffel Tower. For the perfect romantic destination, visit Venice – the magical water city is guaranteed to make you feel giddy. The Valentine's Day Shop also has some special deals on offer to really warm your heart. So start packing your suitcase!

According to tradition, a woman can only ask a man to marry her during a leap year. So if you missed out last year and don't want to wait another three years, now is the perfect time to take the initiative and start excercising your own bended knee. But if your subtle hints don't seem to be working, it may be worth trying something a little more obvious. Such as? Well, we certainly don't recommend pressing your nose up against every jewellery store you pass. If, like many men, yours hates shopping, dragging him out will put you at an immediate disadvantage and he'll only be embarrassed by the grubby marks you leave on the window. That's where Internet shopping really comes into its own. You can check out a fabulous range of rings in the Freeserve Shopping jewellery department without even leaving your chair. All you have to do is log on to Freeserve Shopping at ***www.freeserve.com/shopping***, tell him to sit down and relax (in front of the computer screen, of course) while you make his favourite snack, and he'll be putty in your hands...

But if the mere mention of a ring is likely to make him disappear faster than a hot bacon sarnie, you could do worse than remind him that diamonds are a girl's best friend – and that they also come neatly packaged in necklaces,



Impress your loved one with your culinary skills

bracelets and brooches. For a wide range of beautiful designer jewellery at affordable prices, men should take a look at the choice available on the Freeserve Shopping channel.

If your relationship isn't quite ready to be sealed with a ring but you're still feeling

Ordering gifts online will save him or her the trauma of a shopping trip

generous, you can always give your love a boost by taking a look at the useful Guide to Top Presents to Buy For Him or the Guide to Top Presents to Buy For Her at the Valentine's Shop. And if your partner needs any encouragement to get in the spirit of giving, gently point out that ordering your gift online will save him or her the trauma of a real shopping trip, not to mention time and money. And if you still find yourself stuck for ideas, let the Valentine's Shop point you towards the huge range of gifts available on Freeserve Shopping. Surprise your loved one with a stunning bouquet of beautiful fresh flowers, browse through the Gifts and Gadgets section for something a little bit different, or keep it traditional with cute teddy bears or sexy lingerie.

How about a romantic meal for two? Rather than share a restaurant with dozens of other couples, you could cement your relationship by cooking a special Valentine's Day meal in the more intimate surroundings of your own home. For ideas on what to serve up, check out Romantic Meals for Two on the Valentine's Shop, then browse the aisles at Food and Drink on Shopping for top quality ingredients which you can order online and have delivered straight to your door.

But if it gets to the day itself and you still haven't found the time – or the money – to get a Valentine's gift, Freeserve has the perfect answer. Thanks to eCards, available at the Valentine's Shop, you can send the love of your life a fantastic electronic Valentine's Day card – it can even be animated! It's a perfect idea for getting out of those tricky situations ('Of course I didn't forget, darling – I thought I'd send you the 21st century version') and completely free of charge. It's also just the ticket if you want to quickly send cards to several different people. Just don't be surprised when you receive an electronic card yourself! Remember: it's the thought that counts.

Love is even in the air at FSauctions! This Valentine's, why not impress the one you love with something really unusual or unique by visiting the Freeserve's Auction channel at ***www.fsauctions.co.uk***. Take full advantage of the Valentine's section with the cute and cuddly teddy bear, a bottle of personalised champagne or some 'I Love You' message pebbles – the perfect way to say those three little words. If you're new to online auctions, it's easy to get started and you'll quickly be able to name the price you want to pay for the items on offer and scoop up some really great deals. It's just like bartering, and just as much fun when you get a great bargain. It's also completely secure, with the FSauctions Promise including free buyer's insurance, and there are thousands of bargains to be had every week. If you know exactly what you're looking for you can use the Search facility to find it straight away.

Don't forget that FSauctions always has a fantastic range of computing and other electrical goods from big brand names as well as items for the home and garden, cars, unbeatable travel deals and many other great offers.

And if you want to find out how Valentine's Day actually came about, then pay a visit to the Valentine's Shop, where you'll find the Origins of Valentines.

With Freeserve there's still time to make this Valentine's Day one you'll never forget!

Win luxury Valentine's Day hampers from Freeserve

For the chance to spoil your loved one with a luxury hamper from the Gift Delivery Company, visit the Freeserve competitions site at ***www.freeserve.com/competitions***. There are five hampers to be won, each filled with a bottle of Maxim's champagne and chocolates and adorable 'Send-a-Hug' bear clutching solid peuter love-hearts.

powered by freeserve
www.freeserve.com

Don't panic!

Choose a Valentine's Day surprise from Freeserve

Great Valentine's ideas from Freeserve

- ☐ A trip to a **romantic city**, perhaps Paris, Venice or New York
- ☐ That all important **ring ...**
- ☐ A diamond **necklace**
- ☐ A demonstration of your **culinary** skills
- ☐ A cute **teddy bear**
- ☐ Ever-popular **lingerie**
- ☐ An animated **eCard**

All available from *www.freeserve.com/shopping*

Valentine's Day on icircle, the destination for women

Sorted out his Valentine's gift? Get yourself in the Valentine's mood for romance with icircle.com, the UK's leading Web site for women. If you want to find out whether yours is a match made in heaven or doomed from the start, check out the Love Horoscopes in their Sex and Relationships channel. Or, for more down-to-earth advice, try the interactive compatibility test – partners input their answers to the questionnaire, then simply click to check the verdict!

If you're still looking for Mr Right, you might just end up meeting him through the icircle.com online dating agency. Find out how their reporter got on when she took the plunge and signed up for virtual love, then be brave and give it a go yourself via Sex and Relationships. Once you've got yourself a romantic date, get the right look – from hot lips to great cleavage – with advice from icircle Beauty, then get ready for a truly memorable night with their guide to sensual massage on icircle Sex and Relationships.

Got man trouble? Don't despair! Join the Valentine's Day live chat with top relationships counsellor Anna Raeburn, who will be answering questions on everything from finding the right man to getting him to commit. Let icircle.com help you get love into your life!

Kobal

Do it your way

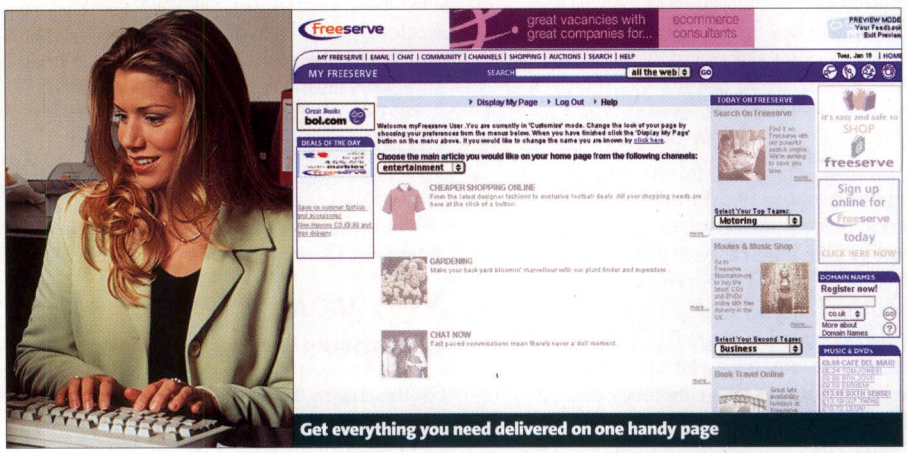
No need to rummage around the Net for your favourite content – customise Freeserve and you can read the latest on all your personal interests in one handy place

If you've ever spent time just surfing for sites on your favourite music, to find a holiday or for more serious research, you'll have quickly discovered that the Internet – also so appropriately known as the World Wide Web – is truly vast. There are now Web sites dedicated to almost every subject imaginable, however obscure, and for broader subjects the number of sites can be quite mindboggling.

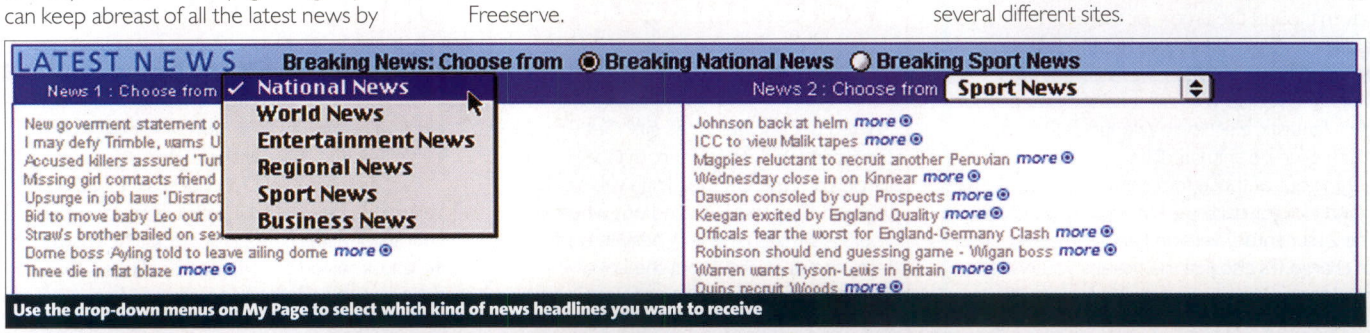
Which is why the channels on Freeserve are really useful. Whether it's entertainment, careers, shopping, travel, business, health or news and weather that you want to keep up with, Freeserve offers you high-quality content, constantly updated and available from one handy site, ***www.freeserve.com***.

But with so many great Freeserve channels to visit, it can be tricky to know where to start! Happily, you can now customise your own page on My Freeserve to make it easy to decide in seconds what to look at first. At ***www.freeserve.com/myfreeserve***, you can personalise a whole Freeserve page to bring you part of the main article on your favourite channel plus snippets of the main content on your three other top channels. And that's not all that your customised page will give you. You can keep abreast of all the latest news by choosing two types of breaking headlines from National, World, Entertainment, Regional, Sport and Business so that they're ready and waiting for you when you log on; select the region where you live and get a daily weather summary for your area; select your star sign and find out what the day has in store for you or, alternatively, check out the latest charts for movies and videos. Finally, you can input ten links to your other favourite Web sites so that they're only a click away from Freeserve.

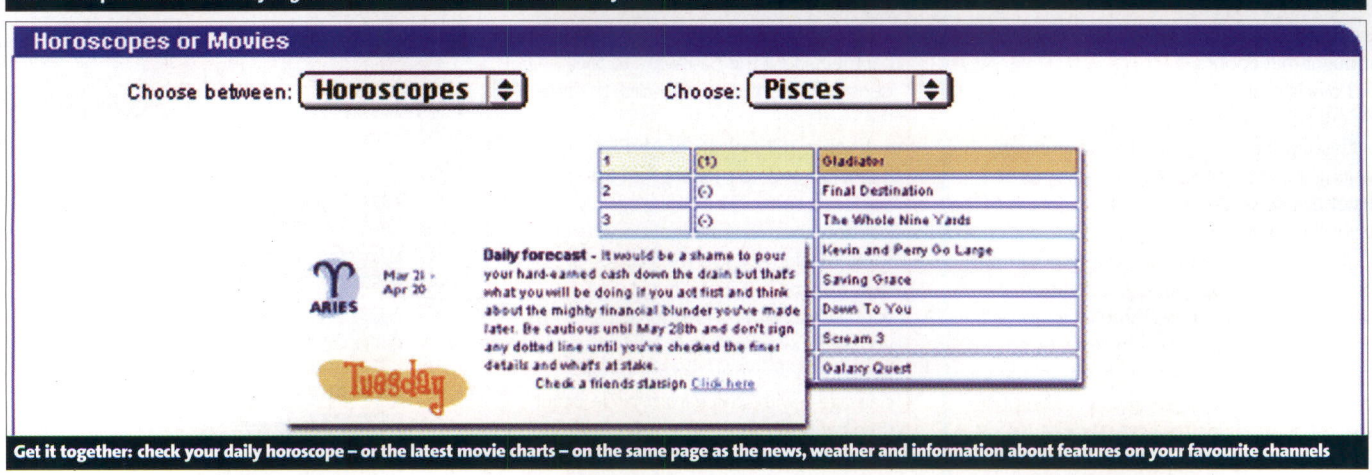
You can also go straight through to any of the respective channels to follow up stories in full and check out the rest of the day's content. But My Page itself is an ideal way to get an overall picture of the day if you've only got a few minutes to spare for checking the Net – perhaps at work while the boss isn't looking, or at home before the kids monopolise the computer. It saves you time and effort by gathering together in once place all the information you would otherwise have to get by visiting several different sites.



Get everything you need delivered on one handy page



Use the drop-down menus on My Page to select which kind of news headlines you want to receive



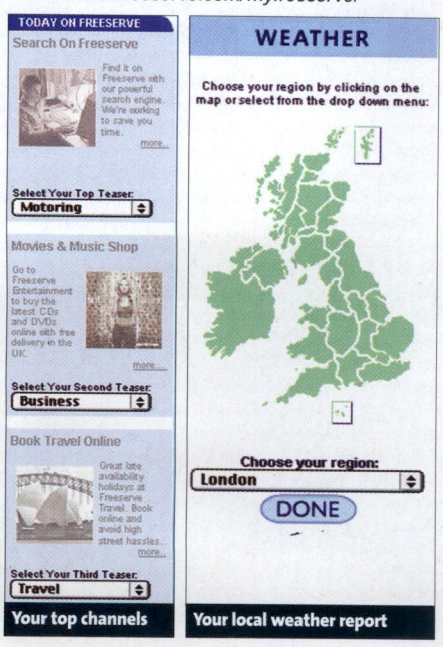
Get it together: check your daily horoscope – or the latest movie charts – on the same page as the news, weather and information about features on your favourite channels

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

Customising your page is really easy. From the Freeserve Today page at *www.freeserve.com* click on the My Freeserve link and log in, then click on 'Customise My Page' button at the top of the My Freeserve home page. This changes the page to the customise mode. From the central drop-down menu choose the channel which will bring you the extract from its main article – if you always like to read the gossip about what the major movie and pop stars are up to, you might choose Entertainment as your main article; if you always turn straight to the back page of the newspaper on your way to work, you'll probably want Sport to be the first thing to greet you when you log on.

Three other menus will give you channels featured in smaller boxes down the right-hand side of the page – perhaps you'll choose Money, Business and Travel or Health, Lifestyle and Shopping. Scroll down the page to find more menus from which to choose the kind of news headlines you want to receive. Sports freaks might want National and Sports news, or if you're using the Internet for work you might want to check World and Business news. Then specify the region whose weather summary you want, followed by your star sign or your choice between the current movie or video charts. To finish off, key in the name and Web address for each of your other favourite sites so that they're all ready and waiting for you every time you visit My Freeserve.

And if you change your mind about your specifications, you can simply nip back to 'Customise My Page' to change them. With My Freeserve, you can have all your essential Net needs waiting together at your fingertips! Go to *www.freeserve.com/myfreeserve*.



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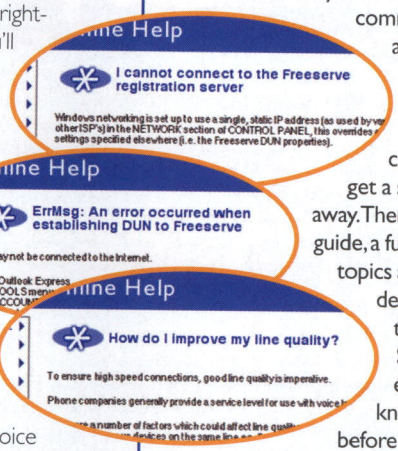
www.freeserve.com

Online help

We've put together an awesome set of answers for all the technical queries that you might have. It's available on our Web site – and it's free!

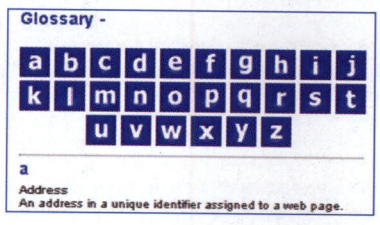


What are my options?

If you're new to the Net, Freeserve is committed to making it as easy as possible for you to get online. We've designed the help section on the Freeserve Web site so you can turn to Freeserve and get a straight answer, straight away. There's a complete content guide, a full alphabetical index of topics and a find function – all designed to take you straight to the answer you need. Separate sections deal with everything you need to know to avoid problems before set-up, and tell you what to expect as you begin to install the software from the CD-ROM onto your machine. It really is that simple!

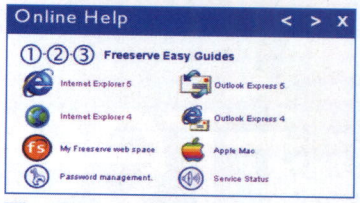
How does online help work?

It's easy! There are four main sources of information. Read through the descriptions below and you'll soon see which best suits the type of query you have. Then connect to Freeserve, visit the help section and get all your questions answered quickly.



The Glossary

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, turn to our glossary first. It's more than likely to be there.



The Easy Guides

If there's an area of your Net use that is causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a complete solution. You'll find answers sorted by subject.

Questions and Answers

If there's a specific question you need answered, turn to our Q&A section for rapid help. First select the general area from our drop-down menu, then a specific question. You may find your question has already been answered.

Contacts

If you still need help, you can email our support staff. They're the same people who staff our phone helpdesks, and they're trained to deal with your queries. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page. They'll be happy to help you!

How do I find answers on the CD?

Alternatively, there's also a fully comprehensive Help feature on the Freeserve start-up CD-ROM. When you put the CD in your machine you'll be given four options. The help button takes you to a comprehensive set of instructions to enable you to get online with Freeserve.
www.freeserve.com/search

Phoneline help

Our experts are on call 24 hours a day

Using Freeserve's online help couldn't be simpler, but from time to time you might have a direct question for one of our experts. To help you get the most out of your connection, Freeserve's Technical Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure you've consulted our online help before you call, as you may find we've already answered your question. If not, our trained staff can provide you with instant answers in plain English on a range of Internet subjects. Calls cost 50p per minute.

PC Support 0906 2517517 Mac 0906 7234000

Main picture: Retna

surf the Internet without watching the clock

Freeserve AnyTime just £12.99 per month

Freeserve leads the way in making the Internet an easier, freer place. And we're doing it again with Freeserve AnyTime.

From January, Freeserve AnyTime gives you Internet calls, anytime, day or night, for an incredible £12.99 per month. Freeserve AnyTime provides all the benefits of Freeserve's fun-packed, easy-to-use, free service without the worry of spiralling telephone bills. No one else can match it.

So if you're a regular Internet user, register for Freeserve AnyTime right now, at www.freeserve.com/time

be freeserve
www.freeserve.com

THE UK's No. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

Sign up online or pick up a free CD at any branch of

Dixons PC WORLD THE COMPUTER SUPERSTORE Currys The Link

See terms and conditions online. BT line customers only.

ADVICE CENTRE

Net help that's one step smarter

@ CHANNELS ://

> 100 TIPS & TRICKS 116
Master the Internet with our eight-page bible of pro shortcuts, tips and tricks – from the Web to email, from fighting hackers to connecting faster

> OUR TOP 50 ISPS 124
The results of our latest lab tests of 200 UK providers – plus our choice of ISP for every type of Net user

> ISP NEWS 126
AOL woos Sony for the wired PS2, breathe.com finds a buyer

> GETTING STARTED 128
Ensure that you've covered all the bases with our back-to-basics guide to email, the Web, chat and newsgroups

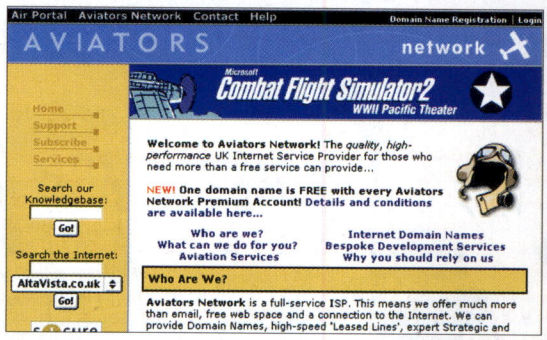
> TESTED OPERA 134
Always third best to Explorer and Netscape, Opera's browser now claims to have the stuff to elevate it to the No.1 slot. We put the claims to the test

> WEB DESIGN 136
How long does it take to build a slick site? A week? A month? Our man proves that, with the right planning, it can be done in just *30* minutes

> Q&A 140
Your pressing problems (well, the less bizarre ones, anyway) solved by our team of dedicated Internet addicts

100 & tips & tricks

COVER STORY Master the Net with our bible of shortcuts and expert tips

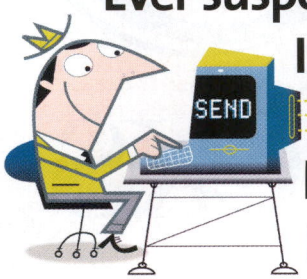


TOP 50 ISPs Ever thought of the Aviators' Network?

Q&A Answers your Net queries

100 tips & tricks

Master the Net with our must-use shortcuts



Ever suspected that you could be man-handling the Internet that little bit smarter? In the name of saving you time and trouble (and a little cash), we've wrung the brains of hardcore Internet users worldwide for the smartest tips, tricks and tomfoolery that will make navigation a cinch and lightning email a walk in the park

Using the Web

1 Protect your youngsters by using dedicated software. There are several blocking programs that can safeguard other users as they surf the Internet. Net Nanny prevents specific information such as your address and phone number from being transmitted (***www.net-nanny.com***), while CYBERsitter analyses Net activity and blocks anything you have chosen to restrict, stopping it before it takes place (***www.cybersitter.com***).

2 Set your own home page. Why settle with your browser's default home page, especially if there's a site you visit regularly that you'd like to appear when booting up. In Netscape, go to the Edit menu, select Preferences, then type in the URL of a new homepage or select the current page. In Internet Explorer 5.5 go to Tools, Internet Options; choose the General tab and change the homepage to one of your liking.

3 Master your bookmarks. In new Netscape Navigator 6, go to the Bookmarks menu and select 'Manage Bookmarks'. This brings up a window containing folders, which include the bookmarks as well as separators to section your folders.

Clicking on the File menu allows you to add new favourites manually, by typing in their URL. Additionally, Netscape will search your hard drive and find the favourites you had installed for Explorer (IE); you'll want to put these in order rather than having them in one folder.

First, set up a new folder by going to File and choosing 'New'. Give it a name using the dialog box; we've called ours 'Poker Chips' to include sites we were looking at which sold game chips. This folder has now been added to the list of Favourites in the main menu. If you put your cursor on the bookmark you want to move and choose Cut from the Edit menu, you can then paste it into the Poker Chips folder.

In this instance, the URL will be pasted but the name will not. If this happens, click on the Entry and choose Properties from the Edit menu. You can then type in the name for the bookmark.

4 Open several browser windows at once to view several sites simultaneously. While surfing, switch between them.

5 Make your browser restrict content. You can set the type of sites you want viewed by using the settings in Windows.

Go to Control Panel and choose Internet Options. Click on the Content tab. You can now access the controls by clicking Enable in the Content Advisor. Press on the category you want to change (Language, Nudity, Sex or Violence) and use the sliding scale to allow increasing or decreasing levels of each to be viewed.

Clicking on the Approved Sites tab allows you to restrict or always allow through certain named sites. Type in the name of the site and click a button to always allow them or never allow them.

Next, go to the General tab and decide whether you want to allow sites that have no rating. If you allow them, you don't get a dialog box asking if you will allow the content every time you come across a site that doesn't use a ratings system, but it means that any user will have instant access to those sites should they so desire.

The only thing left to do now is set up a password to protect these settings. Click on the Change Password button to set up a Supervisor Password. If there isn't already a password set up, leave the Old Password box empty. If your objective is to prevent children from seeing unsuitable material, make sure to use a password which they can't possibly guess.

7 Follow a link without losing your current page by holding down the Shift key and clicking on the link. The new page will open in a new window.

8 Find pages you've visited previously by using the History log. You can even change how long a site is kept in the History file.

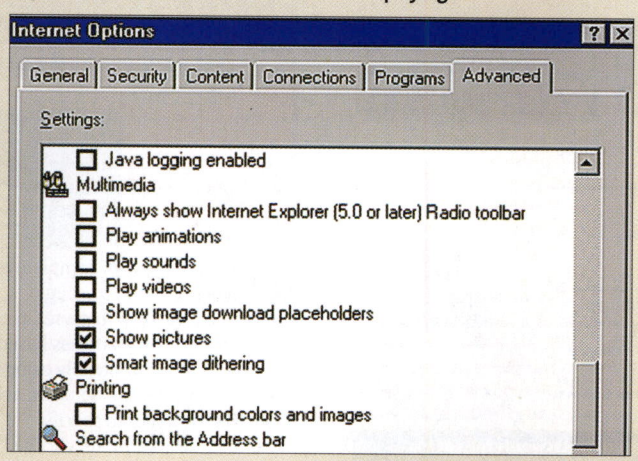
9 Swap browsers NOW. If you're really serious, why not try the Opera browser in place of the usual suspects from Netscape and Microsoft? It has a well-deserved reputation for being faster at surfing, having cut out the whistles and bells of its rivals. It also sticks more closely to Internet standards and takes up a lot less space on your hard drive. This is now available as a free download at ***www.opera.com***. See our full review of it on page 134.

10 Go faster with a text-only browser. For the most basic browsing experience possible, try Lynx. It takes a huge leap back from most browsers in that it only deals with text, but this in turn makes it extremely fast and useful for those times when you are only looking for basic information. The latest version – Lynx 2.8.3 – runs on Unix, and Windows 95/98/NT, with Mac development in beta test. You can download it at ***www.lynx.browser.org***.

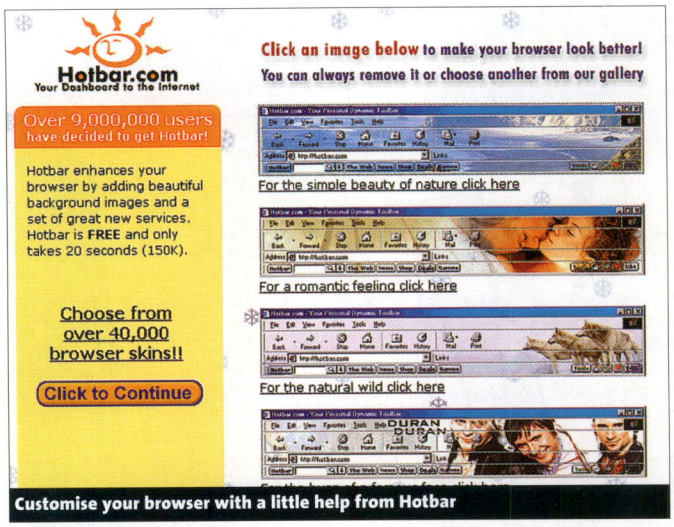
TIME-SAVING TIP

6 TURNING OFF ANIMATED ADS

If you're in a hurry and seeking basic information, turning off the other elements of the page will allow it to download the parts you want more quickly. This is especially true of the animated banner advertisements that keep you waiting while they download. Turning these animated ads off is simple enough, and we'll demonstrate it using Internet Explorer 5.5. Go to the Tools menu and select Internet Options. Click on the Advanced tab to bring up a list of options with check boxes next to them. Scroll down the list until you come to a section titled Multimedia. Make sure the box next to Play Animations is left unchecked. Turning the animated sections of a page off can have ups and downs, though. It will stop you waiting for the banner adverts to download, but will also stop any site-related animations from playing.



ILLUSTRATIONS: DAVID SEMPLE



Customise your browser with a little help from Hotbar

11 Make your browser your own. Why settle for a bog-standard look when you can customise your own unique version using 'skins' from ***www.hotbar.com***?

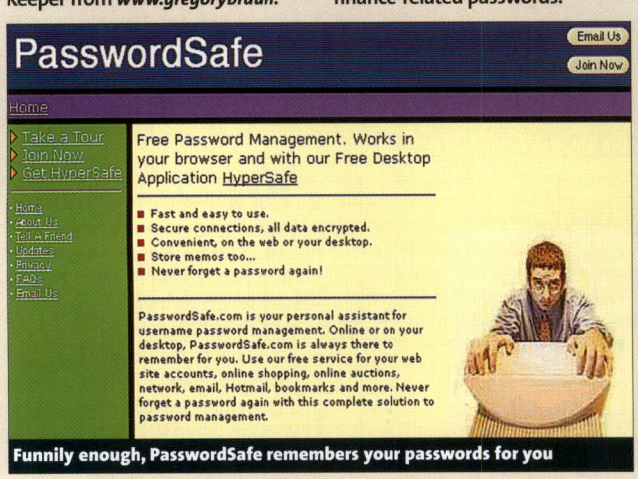
12 Get your PC to warn you to disconnect when you close your browser down, saving you phone charges on a connection you might not realise is still active. If you're using IE you can set this up by going to Control Panel, Internet Properties, Connection. Click on the account on which you want to be prompted and click the Settings button. Then click on the Advanced button and check the box that says Disconnect When Connection May No Longer Be Needed.

13 Keep your plug-ins up to date to ensure that when you go to a site that uses them you can get access straight away. Try to schedule downloads for these when you are doing more casual browsing as they are generally small and won't affect your other activities too much. Don't feel you have to download every plug-in that's going, however, as some Web designers may use relatively unheard of software that you won't encounter elsewhere. If it's not essential, don't waste your phone bill getting it.

15 Find a site's true URL. Some hide the real URL of a page behind the main site address. This can be frustrating if you want to send the address of an exact page to a friend. If you right-click on a link, the menu has an option to copy the URL to the clipboard. You can then paste it into an email.

TIME-SAVING TIP

14 TROUBLE WITH PASSWORDS?
If you're having trouble remembering passwords for all the Web sites you visit, download Password Keeper from *www.gregorybraun.com*. This shareware application ($20 to register) remembers up to 1,000 account passwords for you, leaving you only one login to keep in your head. Obviously not for finance-related passwords.



Funnily enough, PasswordSafe remembers your passwords for you

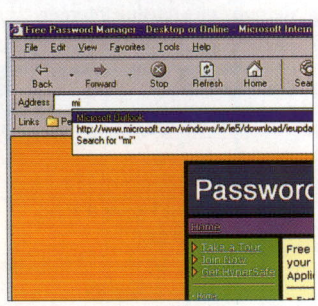
16 Save on your phone bill by browsing the Web offline. To do this, simply add a page to your Favourites in Internet Explorer and check the box to make it available offline. To make sure you don't get left behind with new updates to the page, you can choose to have it synchronised automatically. Go to the Tools menu and choose Synchronise. You can then set a time for it to be updated or instruct it to be done when you are next surfing.

17 Learn the toolbar on your browser, as this will save you time using the drop down menus. If you forget what any of the buttons do, just leave the cursor over the top of them and it will display the function in a little window.

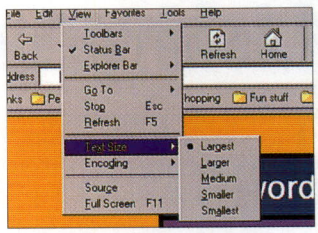
18 Customise your toolbar. If you're not happy with the way your browser looks or works, you can move the buttons around to suit your own tastes or add new ones with new functions, such as opening a Web editing package. In Internet Explorer, place the cursor on the toolbar and right-click, then choose Customize from the drop down menu. In Netscape, go to Edit, Preferences and change the toolbar options.

19 Make more room for pages. Once you've learned the keyboard shortcuts, you can get more room to view pages by turning off the toolbar and status bar. In IE, open the View menu and choose Toolbar, then uncheck the address bar, links bar and main tool bar to free up some room. Go to the View menu in Netscape to do the same.

20 Zap around fields in forms – don't use the mouse to switch between fields, when pressing the Tab key will move the cursor onto the next box.



21 Let your browser complete an address. When you begin typing a URL into your browser, it will try to predict the address based on previously visited sites. By using the cursor keys you can scroll up and down this list to get to specific pages and press Return to choose the one you want.



22 Make pages easy to read by changing the page's default settings. Choose options, such as Text Size, from the View menu.

23 Tell the page what to do. You may need to override the Web page's commands if the page's authors have specified that their choices be followed. This can be done by going into Control Panels, choosing Internet Options and clicking on the General tab. Then click on the Accessibility button and you can choose to ignore the font size, style and colour on Web pages.

24 Store your passwords. Trust someone else to look after your passwords; try the free service at ***www.passwordsafe.com***, which will store all your passwords under different categories for easy access.

25 Store pages on your hard drive so they can be accessed more quickly. It's important to make sure these cached pages are updated regularly, however. You can do this manually by clicking on Refresh when you are on the page, or set the time between pages being cached so they are updated frequently. To do this, go to Control Panels, choose Internet Options and click the 'General' tab. Under the section for Temporary Internet Files, click the Settings button and choose one of the listed time options for when to look for new versions of pages.

26 Earn money while you browse. Many companies now offer cash payments if you download their software and leave ads running on your desktop. Be aware that these programs may collect data about you and send it back to the parent company. If you're thinking an ADSL account is just a few pounds out of your reach, however, this could be the answer to your prayers. Check out ***www.cybergold.com*** for starters.

27 Make Web pages appear sharper by viewing them with a display showing 32,000 or more colours. Go to Control Panel, Display and click on the Settings tab. If you are not offered this option, make sure you have installed the

correct video drivers for your graphics card. Mac users can change their monitor settings by going to the Control Panel and choosing Thousands of Colours.

28 **Don't quit your browser** to go looking for other files on your hard drive or company network. Instead, choose Open from the File menu and Browse for what you want, or if you know the exact path to the folder in which the file is, type it into the Address Bar.

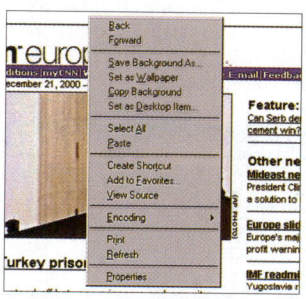
29 **Use your browser to access your hard drive**; in Internet Explorer, just type C:\ in the browser's Web address bar.

30 **To move to the beginning** of a Web page in Internet Explorer or Netscape, press the Home key on the keyboard.

31 **Similarly, to move straight** to the end of a Web page, press the End key.

32 **See how a Web page was made** by choosing View, Source in Internet Explorer, or View, Page Source in Netscape.

33 **Why type in a whole address?** In Explorer, just type a word into the address bar, then press Control and Enter to add the ***www*** and ***.com*** elements to it.



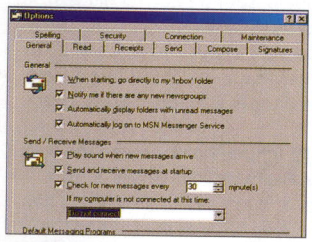
34 **Use shortcuts to go back and forwards.** Right click to bring up the menu and so cut down the time it takes to execute commands such as Back and Forward.

35 **If you don't want Internet Explorer** to keep asking to be your default browser, go to the Tools menu, Internet Options and click on the Programs tab. Uncheck the box at the bottom of the window.

36 **Save the entire page to your hard drive.** In Internet Explorer 5.5, you can use the Save As command in the file menu to save a whole page exactly as it looks, complete with images. You can then open it with the browser when you are offline, which is a fantastic way to save money.

Email

37 **Use quick email previews.** The Preview Pane will let you look at messages without having to double-click to open them. In Outlook Express, go to the main View menu and choose Layout. Click in the box to Show Preview Pane. You can also use this dialog box to customise the other aspects of your mail browser. Click on OK. You will now get an additional window in your email browser; placing the cursor on a message brings up the mail contents in this window.



38 **Don't connect too often.** If you set your email software to check for messages too often, it may try to ring your ISP every time, which can turn out pretty costly if you asked it to check every few minutes. Go to Tools, Options, General Dialog in Outlook Express or Tools, Options, Mail Delivery in Outlook to change this.

39 **Set up more than one account.** If many people use your computer or if you like to split your work and personal messages, set up different accounts within your email software. You can specify which accounts are checked for new emails. In Outlook Express, go to the Tools menu, select Options and then New Account. Enter the details in the relevant boxes, which the ISP can provide you with.

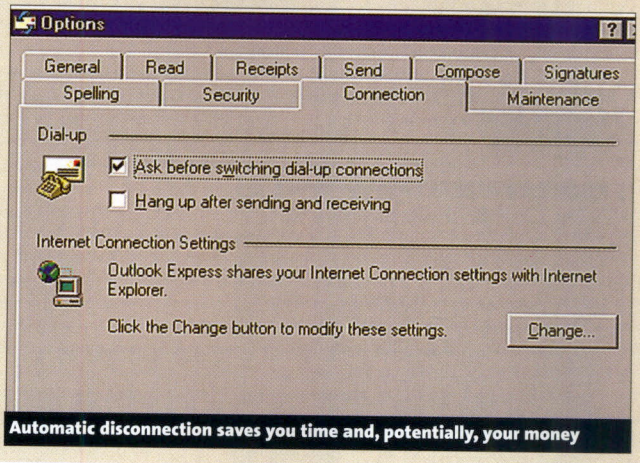
41 **Don't miss calls when you're on the Net.** When you buy a modem, find out if it includes software that will notify you of a call when you're browsing or act as an answering machine. If you connect using free ISP Totalise, (***www.totalise.net***), you can set up your account to save messages and show the numbers of anyone who called, at no extra cost.

42 **Watch out for bad netiquette.** AVOID 'SHOUTING' BY TURNING OFF THE CAPS LOCK and include emoticons, such as a smiley if something is meant as a joke. Learn your emoticons at ***www.cyberwinks.com***.

MONEY-SAVING TIP

40 **AUTOMATICALLY DISCONNECTING**

It's a sensible idea to set up your email software to automatically disconnect after sending and receiving. Not only does it save you the trouble, it also saves you from the potential expense of leaving the connection active by accident. In Outlook Express, go to the Tools menu and select Options. Click on the Connection tab and choose Hang Up After Sending and Receiving.



Automatic disconnection saves you time and, potentially, your money

43 **Cut down on the time** it takes to send emails by only including attachments if absolutely necessary. Rather than including a Word file, cut and paste the text into the email itself.

44 **Including the previous** message in your reply to will allow the recipient to understand your email more fully. In Outlook, go to Tools, Option and click on the Send tab. Click in the Include Message In Reply box.

45 **Manage your contacts.** Keeping details of people with whom you correspond in the email client's Address Book will allow you to send messages quicker.

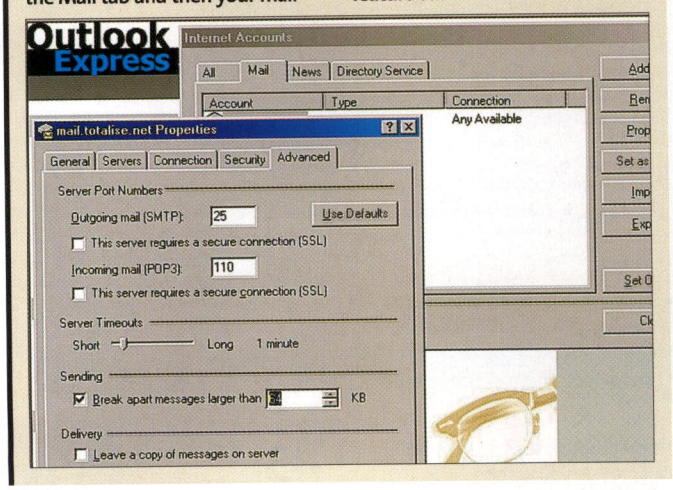
46 **Shrink attachments.** If you send items such as pictures, use a compression program such as WinZip to reduce their size. A shareware version of this can be downloaded at ***www.winzip.com***. The person to whom you are sending the mail will need a similar utility to open the attachment.

47 **Use JPEG or GIF file** types when sending pictures, as these reduce the size of the file automatically. They are also the most common file types, which means that the person receiving the

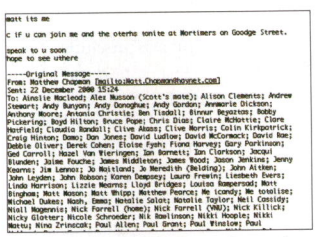
TIME-SAVING TIP

48 SENDING LARGE EMAILS

If you are sending large emails and they are being rejected by the receiving server, it is possible to break them up into a number of smaller emails. To do this in Outlook Express, go to the Tools menu and choose Accounts. Select the Mail tab and then your mail account (you'll have to set this up for each account if you have more than one) and click on Properties. Choose the Advanced tab and, in the section marked Break Apart Messages Larger Than, you can set the file size. Remember, though, to check the box next to this to turn the feature on.



pictures should have no difficulty opening them.



49 Delete addresses of people who previously received an email that you're forwarding email; this reduces the file size, especially if it has been round the houses before it got to you.

50 Send URLs, not text. Why send a big chunk of a Web page in an email when you can simply send the URL to the recipient? Most modern-day email programs will highlight the hyperlink in the message and will be integrated with the default browser. Clicking on the link will launch the browser and take them straight to the site.

51 Send messages as plain text, not HTML. While most browsers should be able to read HTML documents, some older ones won't. Also, plain text emails are smaller in size than their HTML counterparts. In Outlook Express, go to the Tools menu and choose Options. Click on the Send tab and choose Plain Text.

52 Save time by setting up a 'signature'. If there's a regular item of text that you want displayed in every email you send, you can set this up as a signature. In Outlook Express, go to the Tools menu, choose Options, then click on the Signature tab. Choose New Signature and type in your text. Use functions such as colour and font formatting to spice it up. It can be added to every email, or you can go to the Insert menu which appears with a new mail and choose Signature.

53 Signature need not be your, er, signature. If there's info that you need to type into a number of emails, turn it into a signature and it can be added as above.

54 Why air your dirty laundry? If you want to send mail to a number of people but you don't want them to know who else is receiving it, use the BCC (blind carbon copy) function. In most email programs this is easily accessible, but for some reason it's hidden away in Outlook Express. To turn it on, start a new message and go to the View menu. Select All Headers and the BCC function will appear.

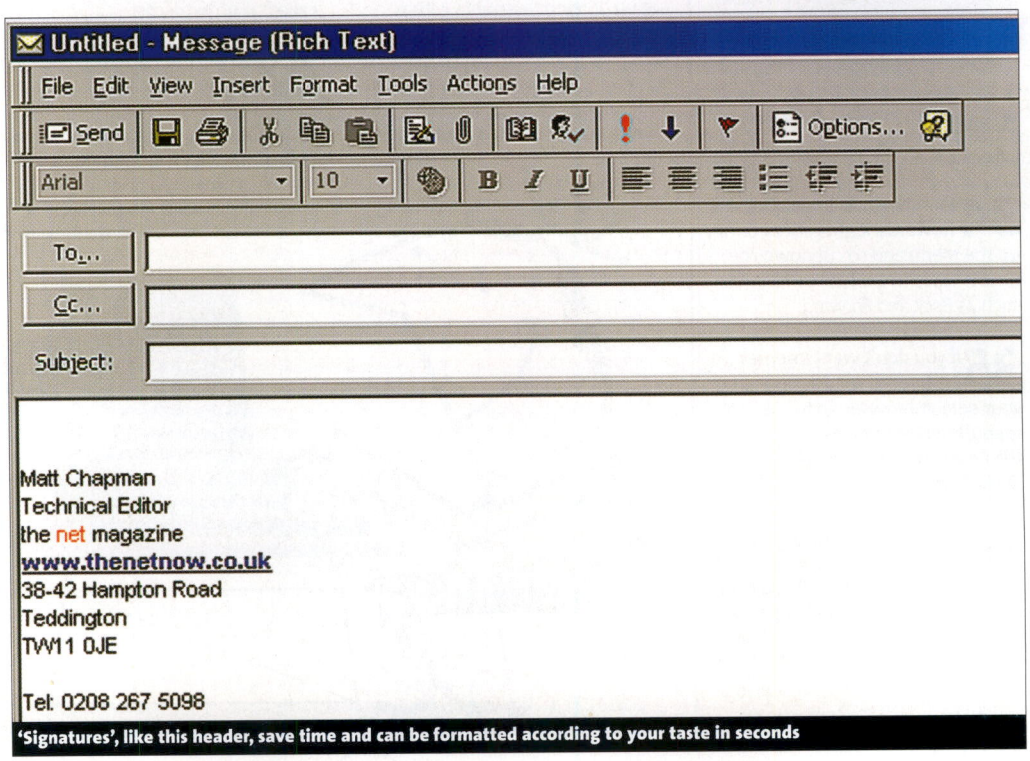
55 Don't beat around the bush with your emails. Some people receive hundreds every day, so keep them as brief and to the point as possible. Make sure the Subject field of an email actually tells them what the message is about. Some programs allow you to make messages a higher priority, although email systems usually just add a red exclamation mark or Urgent tag to make them stand out.

In Outlook Express, open a new message and go to the Tools menu, then select a Priority from High to Low. In Eudora 5.0, click in the square in the top-left corner of a new message and choose from Lowest to Highest.

56 Save money by writing offline. Unless you have an always-on or flat-rate fee account, write your emails offline and then connect to send them. You can download any awaiting emails at the same time and as soon as they are all in, switch off your connection. In Outlook Express, go to the File menu and choose Work Offline.

57 Avoid big downloads. If you receive a large email but don't want to spend the 30 minutes it's going to take to see that humorous MPEG, you can choose not to download emails over a certain size. In Eudora, go to the Incoming Mail option and enter a limit in the Skip Messages Over box. In Outlook Express, go to the Tools Menu and choose Inbox Assistant. Click on Add and then set up a rule where messages over a certain size will not be downloaded from the server.

58 Use Rules to fight spam. As inevitable as death and taxes is the fact that, if you use email, you will at some point get a spam message, usually an advert from someone who has picked up your address from a form you've filled in online. While some of these will have details of how to unsubscribe from their service, many won't. You can use spam filters to direct these messages straight into your trash basket, but you are still paying to download it. Setting up a new rule allows you to delete any mail from that particular sender off the server (see the tip above).



'Signatures', like this header, save time and can be formatted according to your taste in seconds

EMOTICONS

Jazz up your emails – and bring out the *warmth* in them...

Full		Short
:-)	Happy	:)
(-:	Left Handed/Australian	(:
:-(	Sad	:(
;-)	Winky	;)
#-)	Oh, what a night!	#)
:-O	Yelling/Shocked	:O
:-|	Frowning	:|

For those wanting a more 'aesthetically pleasing' emoticon you can use the profile version. Here are some examples: :^) :^] ;^)

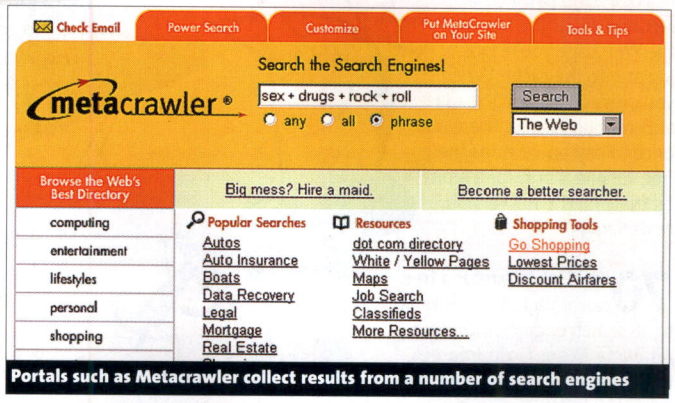
Perhaps a semi-colon too far. So, when words absolutely fail you...

~~:-[	Net Flame
:-$	Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is
:-P	Sticking Out Tongue
:-@	Screaming/Swearing/ Very Angry/About To Be Sick
:*)	Drunk/Clown
>;->	Wicked Grin
:-#	Been Smacked In The Mouth/Wears A Brace/Kiss
R-)	Broken Glasses
(:-)	Bald
:-)))	Is Very Fat
:-{}	Wears Lipstick
=:-)	A Dickhead
>:->	Leering
$-)	Yuppie/Just Won A Large Sum Of Money
:,(	Crying
:=)	Two Noses
8:]	Gorilla
8-)	Wears Glasses
B:-)	Wears Sun Glasses On Head
:-T	Keeping A Straight Face/Tight Lipped
:-y	Said With A Smile
:-|	Disgusted/Grim/ No Expression
:~-(	Crying/Shed A Tear
:'-(	Crying
:~(~~	Crying
:-Q	A Smoker
:-!	A Smoker
%-\	Has A Hangover
|-o	Bored
:-X	A Kiss/Lips Are Sealed
(:-D	Has A Big Mouth
(:+)	Has A Big Nose
:-{)	Has A Moustache
:-*	Just Ate Something Sour/Bitter Taste/Kiss
[:-)	Is Wearing A Walkman

Searching

59 **Make your searching** smarter by using advanced features such putting 'and' or 'not' in between words, or by placing the phrase in quote marks to make it more specific. 'And' or 'not' can often be replaced by '+' or '-' for speed. Some sites list their advance search features in a menu so that you can choose from them more easily.

60 **Even though the same words** typed into a search engine should bring up the same results, changing the order can bring up a different set of sites. Experiment with the order of your search terms.



Portals such as Metacrawler collect results from a number of search engines

61 **Search engines will look** for your specified words in lower case and upper case. If you only want to search for certain words in upper case, write them as upper case when you type them into the search engine.

63 **Be specific about the information you want.** Typing something like 'Star Trek' into a search engine will produce more results than you can handle, while adding other conditions, such as pictures or scripts, will reduce the number of possibilities.

64 **Change your search page** so each time you hit the search button you go to your favourite.

65 **You can search from the** address bar of a browser. In IE, type 'go', 'find' or '?' followed by the subject you want to find. In Navigator, simply type the words you want into the Address bar and it will give you the option to search.

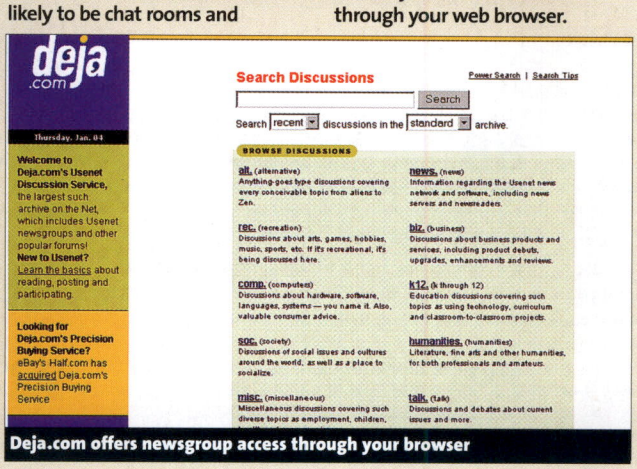
66 **Use a search portal** (such as ***www.metacrawler.com***) that brings up results from a number of other popular search engines.

67 **Once you get to a page,** don't spend time browsing it to find the relevant information. Use the Find command to search for what you are looking for.

TIME-SAVING TIP

62 **GETTING MORE FROM SEARCHES**

Don't just confine yourself to typing keywords into a search engine and following down those leads. Remember there are also likely to be chat rooms and newsgroups dedicated to that subject, containing hundreds of users willing to share their real-world experiences. If you can't get onto newsgroups, *www.deja.com* offers access through your web browser.



Deja.com offers newsgroup access through your browser

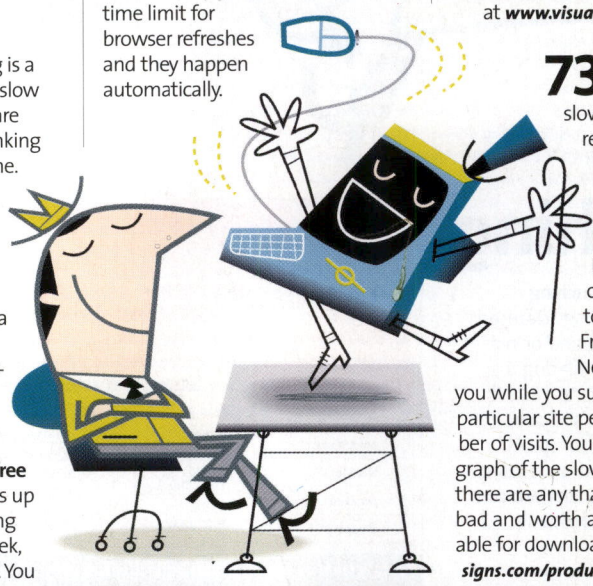
Handy Downloads

68 Use the programs available on the Web to speed up your browsing. NetSonic (download it free at ***www.web3000.com)*** increases your caching ability and stores your favourite Web pages. Of course, caching is only any good if it updates, so NetSonic checks when you request the page and updates it as necessary. You'll have to put up with the advertising if you don't want to fork out $29.95 on the professional version, though.

69 Think ahead. Caching is a big area for reducing slow browsing and smart caches are another example of how thinking ahead can cut down your time. PeakJet 2000 (***www.peaksoft.com***) loads the links on the Web page you're looking at into the cache. When you press on a link, it's ready and waiting for you. There is a price to pay, however, as the free version is only for a limited trial and the full version costs $29.95.

70 Free! WebFerret is a free download that checks up to 28 search engines, including AltaVista, Excite, GoTo, Infoseek, LookSmart, Yahoo! and Lycos. You can set it up to return a maximum amount of hits per search. It also allows you to save your search. Download it at ***www.ferretsoft.com/netferret/index.html.***

71 Stop manually updating pages – check out BrowseFresh ***(www.zdnet.com/downloads)***. This bit of software retrieves information before it's out of date. Simply set the time limit for browser refreshes and they happen automatically.



72 Find out why your connection is slow – it could be because you're sending info all around the world. Download VisualRoute to see where you've been. You may find that your data is going through a stack of Internet routers before it reaches the site you've requested. This program show you a map of the route taken (think of the film *Sneakers*, where the signal is being traced by the Government), and it will also tell you which routers are slowing things up and who owns them. Download it at ***www.visualroute. com.***

73 Lay the blame. A connection can be slow for a number of reasons, and some sites just don't have enough support for a large number of users. If you want to find out if the site itself is to blame, use the Freeware program Net.Medic. It watches you while you surf and tracks how a particular site performs over a number of visits. You can then call up a graph of the slowest sites and see if there are any that are consistently bad and worth avoiding. It's available for download at ***www.vitalsigns.com/products/nm/index.html***.

74 Cut out connection time. If you want to speed up the time it takes to connect to a site (and let's face it, you do), don't bother with the traditional Web address; this is only an easy way for people to remember the names of sites. The actual site you're trying to connect to is identified by a series of numbers making up the IP address. Every time you type in a Web address, your browser has to find a server that will tell it what the IP address of that name is before it can attempt to connect you. Cut out the middleman by creating an IP address book. Naturally, there is a program out there to make this easy. SpeedTec will collect IP addresses without your even having to type in the complicated strings of numbers. Get it at ***www.virtualsoftware.com.***

75 Use a download manager. Popular ones, such as GoZilla ***(www.gozilla.com)***, can either work with your browser or stand on its own. You can schedule transfers to happen later or pick up where you left off with previously halted downloads. You can also drag file links straight off the page and drop them onto GoZilla's interface and it will search for the fastest server. However, unless you pay to register, it will display advertisements on your computer.

FROM SETTING UP MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS TO SMART CACHING, IT'S TIME FOR...

General tips

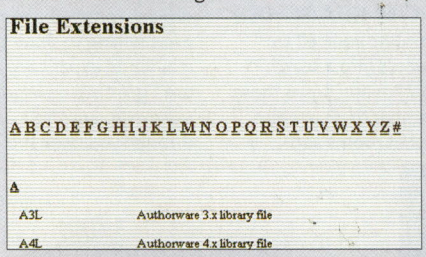
83 Set up several free Internet accounts so if one isn't connecting, you can use another. Avoid downloading the software that sets up the account so you don't change anything else on your system. To set up more ISP accounts, click on Dial Up Networking and choose Make a New Connection. Select your modem and type in the ISP's name. Click Next and enter the number for Internet access (get this and a password from your ISP). Click Next and then Finish. Double-click the icon to launch the account and enter the password.

84 To *really* cut down on your time online, learn the keyboard short cuts which are written next to the commands in the menus.

85 To see if you are connected on your PC, look at the small icons in the bottom right of the screen, next to the time. If there is an icon of two computers with flashing screens, you are connected. Click on this icon to see how long you have been online and how much information you have downloaded.

86 Surf cheaply: if you do a lot of surfing, add the phone number of your ISP to your Friends and Family list if you use a BT phone line.

87 RTFM first. If you want to make an enquiry about something on a Web site and that site contains an FAQ, make sure you read it to see if someone else has already asked the same question. If not, you may get the standard RTFM response from an angry host, which basically means Read the F**king Manual.


File Extensions

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z #

A

A3L Authorware 3.x library file

A4L Authorware 4.x library file

88 When you click on an attachment, your computer usually recognises it and chooses the appropriate program to open it. If for any reason it doesn't recognise what type it is, however, you can look up the file's extension at ***www.dmccabe.uklinux.net/update2/filextensions.html.*** This should tell you what type of program to use in order to open it.

89 Upgrade your modem. If you're using a modem to connect and it isn't at least 56K, you're wasting valuable dial-up time waiting for information to download at slower speeds. Upgrading to a 56K model shouldn't cost the earth, and internal PCI modems are your cheapest option – although some people will undoubtedly balk at the idea of opening up their PC and slotting in a new component. The proliferation of auction sites also provide cheap alternatives, but make sure it comes with the drivers to save you hassle when you are installing it.

90 Use the most up-to-date drivers for your modem, as having the latest set could increase the speed at which the modem works. The drivers that come on a disk or CD with the modem might not be the most recent, and it's worth checking the manufacturer's site for news of any updates.

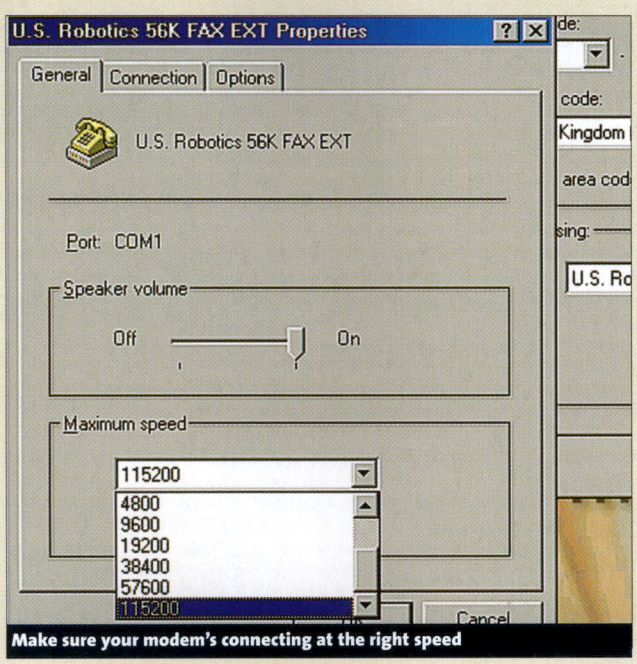
91 Restrict the number of items you have attached to the phone line, which is easier said than done in today's world of dial-up set-top boxes and phones in every room of the house. Modem speeds can be affected by line noise, caused when there are is a lot of equipment connected to the same phone line. Line noise can also cause you to disconnect from your ISP.

92 Check to see at what speed you've connected by clicking on the dial-up icon that appears next to the time in the bottom right-hand of the screen. If you are connecting at

MONEY-SAVING TIP

76 OPTIMISE YOUR MODEM SPEED

If you've upgraded your modem, check your accounts to make sure they are connecting at the right speed and with the right modem settings. In Windows, go to the Dial-Up Networking folder and right-click on the account you want to check. Choose Properties from the drop down menu and choose the correct modem from the list. Then click on the Configure button and change the Maximum Speed setting to 57,600.



Make sure your modem's connecting at the right speed

Security

77 Watch out for spyware that downloads itself onto your hard drive and reports back on your browsing habits. These free programs will hunt out spyware and remove it: OptOut ***(grc.com/optout.htm)*** and Ad-Aware ***(www.lavasoft.de).***

78 Use an up-to-date browser, as some of the older versions send your email address to a site whenever you download any information using FTP.

79 Use a personal firewall. With the increase in hacking and a rise in the amount of always-on connections, use a firewall such as the free download Zone Alarm, from ***www.zonelabs.com.***

80 Thwart known viruses in Outlook or Outlook Express by going to the Tools menu and create a New Message Rule. Any email containing a known virus signature, *eg* ILOVEYOU, is deleted before being read.

81 Monitor the cookies that are stored on your hard drive. These can be found in a folder called Temporary Internet Files in the Windows folder on your hard drive. Some older browsers store them under 'cookies'. Netscape also tends to put some cookies in its own folder, so look in Program Files, Netscape, Users, your name, to clear them out.

82 If you're having trouble tracking down all the cookies, let Complete Cleanup do it for you. Available at ***www.softdd.com/complete/index.htm*** this software works with both Internet Explorer and Netscape, as well as AOL's browser.

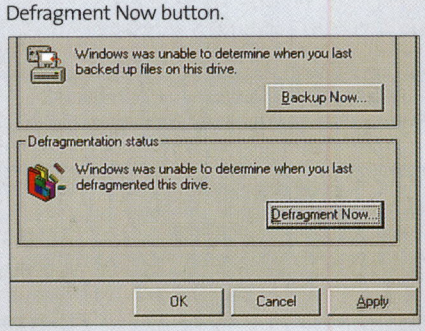
a speed lower than your modem's top speed, try a different ISP to see if it improves. Modems check the speed supported by the current phone line and may connect at lower speeds if the higher levels aren't available when you first dial in. However, they should continue to monitor the line and adjust accordingly.

93 Surf while America sleeps. Most of the US comes online during early afternoon, slowing down a number of high and low profile sites alike through the sheer amount of usage. This can be especially frustrating if you need to download a large file, so this is best attempted as early as possible in the morning.

94 Go faster. If you still crave more speed, the only option may be to upgrade your telephone line. There are several Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) services available, although up until now they have been getting bad press because of poor services, long waits for installation and even unavailability in some parts of the country. There's always ISDN, but this generally costs the same as DSL for lower connection speeds.

95 If your PC's memory isn't up to speed, this could slow down the rate you access pages by cutting down the speed of your caching. The same goes for your CPU. If you can't afford to upgrade, try surfing without any other programs open, as this should free up some memory.

96 Defragment, now. Your hard drive contains two important file areas: a virtual memory swap file and a folder that contains your browser's cache files. Defragging your drive can help sort the data and, if the PC can find all of the cached data in one place, it will access it faster. To do this, double-click on the My Computer icon and right-click on the hard drive (usually C). Choose Properties from the drop down menu and select the Tools tab. Then click on the Defragment Now button.



97 Transfer info faster. If you are running your modem through the serial port on the PC, you can bump up the connection to make sure information is transferred as fast as possible. Go into Control Panel and double-click on the System icon. Choose the Device Manager tab and select the modem you're using. Right-click to bring up a menu and choose Properties, then Connection. Click on the Port Settings button and up the capacity of the Receive Buffer.

98 Improve your graphics card. It may sound like an unnecessary expense, but it deals with the redrawing of the screen and the graphic content of Web sites, both of which can be time-consuming if you are running a low-end card.

99 Hand over at least 10MB of space on your hard drive to get the best out of caching. If you use more than 10 percent of your drive, you may slow down the speed at which pages are brought back from the cache. In Explorer, go to the Tools menu, select Internet Options and click the General tab. Under Temporary Internet Files, click Settings. Under 'Amount of disk space to use', drag the slider to the right to increase the amount of your hard disk used for caching. In Navigator, go to the Edit menu, select Preferences, choose Advanced, and select Cache.

100 The reverse is also true, if you don't return to the same site over and over again, clear the cache often to free up the space.

Our top 50 ISPs

March 2001 Here's the best from our lab tests of 200 UK providers

ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	PHONE	EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends				
Breathe.com	www.breathe.co.uk	Free ISP with easy-to-use design, recently rescued by GUS. See p126	0800 500150	5
Tiny Online	www.tinyonline.net	Includes a 'launcher' application to keep track of time on-line.	0900 290 9103	5
F9 Free	www.f9.net.uk	Free ISP from previously subscription only service Force 9.	0800 0737800	Unlimited
Powergen	www.pgen.net	Earn points which you can use in paying your PowerGen energy bills.	0900 2909158	5
Free Internet	www.free-internet.co.uk	Free access, free mail and webspace. Comprehensive service .	Sign up online	1
Free Online	www.free-online.net	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email.	0870 7060504	5
Sniff Out	www.sniffout.net	Full range of features, content and technical support options.	01883 742510	Unlimited
Gateway 2000	www.ukgateway.net	ISP service from the hardware retailers of the same name.	Gateway Stores	Unlimited
UK Online Ltd	www.ukonline.co.uk	Family-friendly free ISP. Shareware & gaming software. Sign up online.	01749 333333	1
The X-Stream Network	www.x-stream.com	Uses advertising to offer enhanced services such as 0800 offers.	0870 7306466	1 Unified
Smartone	www.smartone.co.uk	Content-based service offering free dial-ups and plenty of rewards.	08700 774411	1 Unified
Freeserve	www.freeserve.net	Free provider from Dixons group. See p126 for news of unmetered service	0990 500049	Unlimited
FreeNet	www.freenet.co.uk	More free access with a gaming bias.	01329 828282	Unlimited
This is it!	www.thisisit.co.uk	End-user targetted free ISP.	0906 9124000	Unlimited
Freewire	www.freewire.net	Simply dial 0845 088 0088 with any username and password.	Sign up online	Unlimited
CALLNET	www.callnetuk.com	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced web based services	0171 3358300	5
Go Free	www.gofree.co.uk	Free ISP offering online signup, complete with helpline	Sign up online	Unlimited
Dabsol	www.dabsol.net	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features.	Sign up online	Unlimited
Virgin Net	www.virgin.net	Long standing ISP now offering a stylish free Internet access service.	0500 558800	5
Freeway	www.freewayuk.com	Comprehensive service including free access, free mail and webspace.	0906 6903319	Unlimited
Free to You	www.freezyou.co.uk	No frills free ISP with online sign-up.	Sign up online	Unlimited
Eisdosnet	www.eidosnet.co.uk	An ISP brought to you by Eidos, publishers of Tomb Raider.	Sign up online	Unlimited
UK Fantastic	www.ukfantastic.net	Spirited free ISP offering good online technical help.	0870 740 7777	Unlimited
Freezone	www.freezone.co.uk	A free ISP offering the usual package in a smart format.	0870 744 1111	Unlimited
Bigwig	www.bigwig.net	Free internet access in a complete package. Clear and well presented.	01509 651451	5
UK People	www.ukpeople.net	Free ISP, online chat, set-up and help.		Unlimited
Aardvark	www.aardvaak.co.uk	No technical support, but also no adverts.		1
IC24	www.ic24.net	The Mirror Group Newspapers' free ISP, powered by Cable and Wireless.	0870 9090262	Unlimited
Connect Free	www.connect-free.net	One of the first subscription-free ISPs.	Sign up online	Unlimited
LineOne	www.lineone.net	A free ISP backed by British Telecom.	0800 111210	5
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing				
AOL	www.aol.co.uk	A large ISP offering value added services to the home user.	0800 3765432	5
Aviators Network	www.aviators.net	ISP designed with aircraft related content for pilots and the enthusiasts.	0700 2842867	1
Nildram	www.nildram.net	Subscription-based ISP with a Low User option.	0800 0720460	Unlimited
Paradise Internet Network	www.pins.co.uk	Paradise Internet are a subscription provider who also author software.	01256 414863	1
Netcom	www.netcom.net.uk	A comprehensive range of services to the home and business user.	0800 9809107	20
Compuserve	www.compuserve.com	Long standing ISP using proprietry software for ease of use.	0990 000200	5
OrbitalNet	www.orbitalnet.co.uk	Subs-based ISP with a range of account options to suit any needs.	01233 646505	5
CIX	www.cix.co.uk	Specialists in conferencing and Voice over IP solutions for business.	0845 3555050	Unlimited
ClaraNET Ltd	www.clara.net	Subs-based ISP with a range of account options to suit any needs.	0800 3582828	Unlimited
BT Internet	www.btinternet.com	Another internet arm of BT offering a full access package.	0800 800001	5
Which? Online	www.which.net	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine of the same name.	0645 830240	1
Demon Internet	www.demon.net	The UK's original dial-up account, launched in 1992.	0845 272 0666	Unlimited
Easynet Ltd	www.easynet.net	Won best European ISP at this years ISPA awards.	0171 6814444	Unlimited
First Web	www.first-web.co.uk	ISP based in Middlesex, uses local call charges to connect.	0870 7409223	4
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses				
Firstnet Services Ltd	www.firstnet.co.uk	Business solution provider developing bespoke IP packages.	0113 2944224	Unlimited
Netcom	www.netcom.co.uk	A comprehensive range of services for home and business users.	0800 9809107	20
UUNet	www.uk.uu.net	Business solutions and Pipex Dial for single/multi-user accounts.	08702 424220	12
London Web Comms	www.londonweb.net	A London-based ISP with an emphasis on corporate clients.	0181 3494500	3
Direct Connection	www.dircon.net	Home and business ISP offering global roaming amonst their services.	0800 0720000	Unlimited
CYBERphile Internet	www.cyberphile.co.uk	Midlands-based business-oriented provider.	01543 454840	1
AngliaNet Limited	www.anglianet.co.uk	Dial-up, web hosting and design for home and business users.	01473 211922	1

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Apple Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

TOP 50 ISPs

HELPING YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT CONNECTION

Reliability, speed of connection and value for money are the three criteria we weigh up to objectively identify the best ISPs and award star ratings.

Variation in modem speed Measures whether you get a constant speed once connected. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses position the greater the variance in connection speed.

Variation in time to connect The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, through the engaged tone or failure to respond correctly to modem signals.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you is correct. The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme should contact eval@netbasics.com. For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

CONTENT	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE (£)	MONTHLY CHARGE (£)	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS	VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance, etc.	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales.	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Local	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	0.00	0.00	National	7-11, 7 Days	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Uk free ISP. Newsgroups & IE5 download.	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	0.00	Premium Rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	0.00	National rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Free	24/7	★★★★☆
None	Yes	K56Flex	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Chat, news, lifestyle, shopping, etc.	No	K56flex	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Portal site containing general interest links.	Yes	V.90	0.00	0.00	Metered	9-6 Mon-Sat 10-5 Sun	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Games links and independent status.	Yes	K56Flex, X2	0.00	0.00	National rates	9-6pm 7 days (10-5pm Sun)	★★★★☆
None	No	K56Flex	0.00	0.00	£1 per minute/via e-mail	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Chat servers, channels, services, news and mail.	Yes	K56Flex	0.00	0.00	Free	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
Virgin channels including news, Web TV, etc.	Yes	X2	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Channel layout including news, sport, etc.	No	K56Flex	0.00	0.00	50p per minute/online	24/7	★★★☆☆
Search engine page and technical support	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Tel support available soon	n/a	★★★☆☆
Free access to the Mplayer games network.	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	0.00	0.00	Metered	9am - 11pm	★★☆☆☆
On-site search engine access.	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	No	K56Flex	0.00	0.00	£1 per minute	9-9 M-F, 10-8 Sa,10-5 Sun	★★☆☆☆
Access to a UK online community, and games.	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	0.00	0.00	Unavailable	n/a	★★☆☆☆
Channel based content with news, sport, etc.	No	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Channel based content provided by Virgin	No	V.90	0.00	0.00	Unavailable	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Channel based layout with news, shopping, etc.	Yes	K56Flex, X2	0.00	0.00	50p per minute	8-Midnight M-Sa 10-10 Su	★★☆☆☆
Massive content, from chat to holidays.	Yes	V.90	0.00	14.99	Free	8-10.30 M-F 9-9.30 Sa	★★★★★
listings including flight planning and navigation.	No	K56Flex	0.00	11.75	Standard	9-9 7 days	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	11.75	Local	8-9 (7 days)	★★★★★
None	Yes	X2	17.63	9.40	Metered	11-7 M-F	★★★★☆
Technical support and a portal site.	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	14.95	National	24/7	★★★★☆
Portal style site with a large range of channels.	No	V.90	0.00	16.95	National	8-12 Midnight 7 Days	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	0.00	Local	Business Hours	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	0.00	17.61	Local	8am-10pm w & 11-6 w/end	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	0.00	8.99	Free	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	0.00	11.75	Local	24/7	★★★☆☆
More than 40,000 screens of consumer affairs.	Yes	K56Flex	11.75	14.75	Free	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	0.00	11.75	Local	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex	0.00	11.99	Free	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	No	K56Flex	0.00	7.73	Local	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Search engines and support.	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	0.00	12.50	Local	Business Hours	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	0.00	14.95	National	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	Call	Call	Call	9-8 M-F, 10-6 Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	17.63	14.68	Standard	9-9 M-Sa	★★★★★
User zone containing handy member services.	Yes	K56Flex, X2	0.00	13.50	Local	9-9 7days	★★★★★
None	Yes	33.60	0.00	11.74	Standard	8.30-6.00 M-F	★★★★☆
None	Yes	33.60	None	11.75	Mobile	9-5 M-F, 8-9 M-S, Sun 12-6	★★★★☆

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

Great Universal gives Breathe the kiss of life

Troubled ISP rescued in £14 billion deal with Argos' parent company

Great Universal Stores, which owns Argos, has rescued Breathe.com in a deal worth £1.4bn.

Great Universal said Breathe's knowledge of accessing the Internet using PCs, Wap phones and other devices would allow it to push its retail business into these areas.

Breathe had put itself up for sale, after failing to secure further financing to cover debts estimated at £50m.

The company had already axed its unmetered Internet service, claiming that its business model was unworkable. Breathe blamed excessive use by subscribers and closed its service after a run of just nine months. An initial 50,000 users had signed up for the service, paying a one-off fee of £50. But the writing was on the wall when 500 users were thrown off in July for logging on for extended sessions.

Breathe came top in this month's ISP test and Matt Dockerty, spokesman at ISP monitoring firm NetBasics, said the company had continued to take on new registrations while in the hands of the administrators.

The deal includes all of the assets and technology of Breathe, but Great Universal will not assume any of Breathe's previous liabilities.

www.breathe.com

Cable operators scrap ADSL plans

Cable operators Telewest and ntl have scrapped their plans to offer high-speed Internet access using British Telecom's phone lines.

The two companies said they were abandoning digital subscriber line (DSL) services in favour of fast cable modem packages usinge their own fibre networks.

Under a new agreement, BT will have to share local phone lines with competitors, allowing them to offer long-awaited DSL services.

A spokeperson for Telewest said it made more sense for the company to spend its money marketing its cable modem service. It also claimed it could offer better bandwidth and greater speeds than DSL.

NTL said using its cable network made more sense technically, as the US had suffered problems with ADSL (asymmetric DSL).

www.ntl.com, www.telewest.com

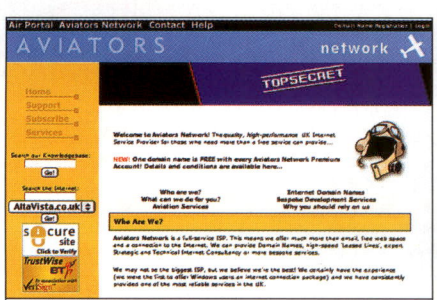
Anytime is good for peak time users

TOP ISPs OUR CHOICE FOR SPEED AND VALUE

Freeserve is this month's ISP of choice for heavy Internet users. This service, from the Dixons group of companies, is often credited with launching the free ISP model. Freeserve is now moving into the area of unmetered access for the home user with its Anytime service (***www.freeserve.com/time***). If you use the Internet for more than eight hours a month at peak rate times, this flat rate Internet call package is for you with 24/7 access for £12.99 per month and no call charges.

For evening and weekend surfers, we recommend The Aviators Network (***www.aviators.net***), an ISP that was originally designed to bring aircraft-related content to pilots and enthusiasts, but has since spread its wings further. The Aviators Network still includes flight planning information and navigation, and provides access to The Flyer portal site. However, it has also established a reputation for quality and performance, boasting good customer service and 24-hour free technical support. Out of all ISPs featured in our league table, it came in seventh, beating some notable competition.

Business users should take a look at Firstnet Services (***www.firstnet.co.uk***). Snatching second place in this month's league, Firstnet offers connection to the Net plus services including ADSL, domain hosting, databases, video conferencing and satellite connectivity. However, support is only available during business hours and if that's when you need to go online, it's likely to be something important.



EVENING & WEEKEND SURFERS

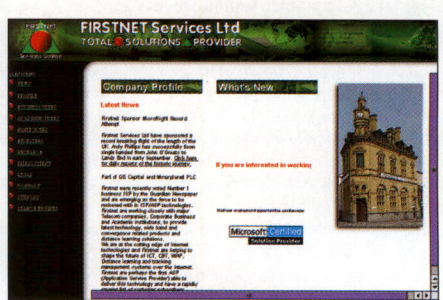
THE AVIATORS NETWORK ***www.aviators.net***

Consistent top 20 placing in ISP charts for over three years, free 24/7 support and gimmick-free services. Ideal for those using the Net mostly for entertainment. Subscription-only.

HEAVY HOME USERS

FREESERVE (Anytime) ***www.freeserve.com***

Freeserve's Anytime service is one of the best compromises we have found between quality and cost, offering a reasonable quality, well presented service for a flat £12.99 per month.



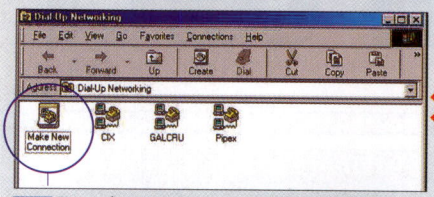
BUSINESS USERS

FIRSTNET SERVICES LTD. ***www.firstnet.co.uk***

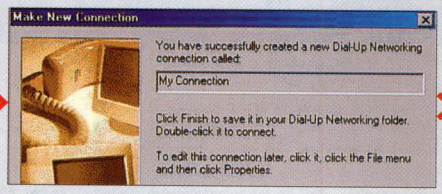
Bespoke product range, high physical bandwidth, web design and hosting. A sound application service provider (ASP) business model, ISO9002 certified. One to watch.

WHY BE AT THE MERCY OF ONE CONNECTION?

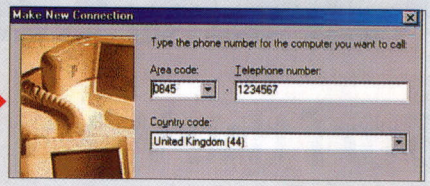
HOW TO SWITCH ISPS IN SECONDS»



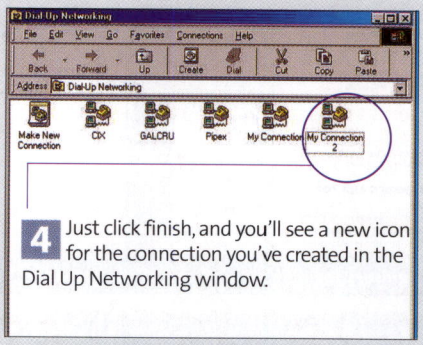
1 To make your new connection, go Start > Programs > Accessories > Communications > Dial Up Networking. Then just click the 'make new connection' icon.



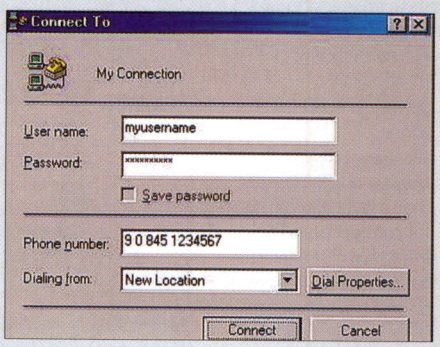
2 Start by typing in your intended ISP's name (your PC should automatically choose your modem), then click Next.



3 Now type in the new ISP's telephone number (you'll get this just by calling them and asking) and make sure you choose the correct country to show where you're dialling from.



4 Just click finish, and you'll see a new icon for the connection you've created in the Dial Up Networking window.



TOP TIPS
Copy the new connections onto your desktop. That way, when one ISP won't connect, you can simply switch to another one in seconds, rather than having to navigate back to the Dial Up Networking window.

5 Double-click the new icon to access the window into which you should input the username and password supplied by the new ISP. Hit 'connect', and dialling should begin...

AOL woos Sony in PS2 Internet access deal

PlayStation 2 may be able to provide Internet access later this year

AOL is in talks with Sony about providing Internet access for the PlayStation 2 console.

A spokesperson for Sony said the company had had a number of offers from different companies to provide broadband content through its new console. But Sony hasn't yet announced whether it will set itself up as an ISP, as it may want to promote its own brand – including its movies and music.

Any deal would be some time in coming though, as Sony is apparently waiting for broadband networks to become more widespread in the UK. The consoles won't be able to access broadband services until the release of an add-on unit later this year.

The delay won't hurt too many consumers, as the PlayStation 2 was sold out in the UK at the time of writing. Sony's estimated it would ship units 200,000 before Christmas but only offered 165,000 units at launch.

www.playstation-europe.com

Net Basics
The Internet in Focus
ISP Directory

Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

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Net Basics™
NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
info@netbasics.com
Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

Getting started

Surf the Web

SIMPLE, THIS. YOU NEED A computer (commonly a PC running Microsoft Windows, but some people use strange things called Apple Macintoshes), a means of connecting to the Internet (a modem device usually built into the computer, plus an account to dial in to) and a means of seeing the Web pages (that's a browser).

BROWSERS Usually free of charge and pre-installed on new PCs. If not, you can download one from the Internet (use your employer's network; it'll be cheaper and quicker) or from a CD (you'll find them in magazines like this one). Current champion is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***), but lagging not far behind is Netscape's reliable, adaptable and recently much-improved Navigator (***home.netscape.com/uk/download***). However, there are many 'rebel' browsers either designed for a specific computing platform or boasting strength at a particular function (see below).

NET CONNECTION Most modern PCs come with a built-in modem, a device that will dial your Internet Service Provider (see p134) and therefore connect you to the Internet. Most modems these days run at 56K – OK, but hardly rapid fire. If you want to go quicker, you'll need to look at either 64K/128K ISDN, *eg* BT's Home Highway, or else 10Mbps ADSL (a permanent, zip-quick connection; for details see ***www.btopenworld.com***). Remember that most ISPs charge for connection, either in the form of a fixed fee (say £9.99 a month) or on a pay-as-you-go basis (say 1p a minute). Consider at what times you surf most and exactly how much before choosing your tariff.

£ SAVING TIPS

Open more than one window on the Web and plan your surfing. That way, while one page downloads you can be setting up the next in a new browser window. And why stay online while you read a page? Explorer 5.5 and Netscape 6 let you save the entire page to your hard drive.

YOUR COMPUTER Virtually every modern PC is quick enough to handle the software required to surf the Internet. Your only choice really is platform: while most plump for PCs running Microsoft Windows, recent years have seen a resurgence in the fortunes of the Apple Mac (mostly thanks to the cutesy iMac). Needless to say, new Internet software is written for PC first, Mac some time after – and the huge and growing online gaming industry is virtually built around PC.

Explorer 5.5: plain grey in PC guise; streaming radio all part of the package

New Netscape 6: colourful, funky; AOL Instant Messenger built in

THERE'S MORE TO BROWSERS THAN EXPLORER AND NETSCAPE

BROWSER ALTERNATIVES>>

PC BROWSERS

BROWSER	RATING	FOR	AGAINST	DOWNLOAD FROM
AMAYA	★★☆☆☆	Great for those into Net standards...	...not for those who aren't	***www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html***
ARACHNE	★★☆☆☆	It runs in DOS and is written by Czechs	A pain to set up	***arachne.cz***
CUSTOM BROWSER	★☆☆☆☆	Adds minimal extra customisation to IE	It's just IE with an ad in the top panel	***www.custombrowser.com***
HOTJAVA	★★☆☆☆	Pretty showcase for Java technology	Slow, though not as bad as on the Mac	***java.sun.com/products/hotjava/3.0***
INTERNET EXPLORER	★★★★★	For the moment, the king of all browsers	Hard to fault, unless you really try	***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***
LYNX	★★★★☆	The original text-only browser	If it isn't text, Lynx isn't interested	***lynx.browser.org***
MOSAIC	★★★☆☆	Good for developers	Feels old. Is old. Not updated since 1996	***www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/mosaic-w***
NEOPLANET	★★★★☆	Funky interface replacement for Explorer	Internet Explorer in new clothes	***www.neoplanet.com***
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★☆	Wide range of features for hardcore users	Doesn't display pages as prettily as IE	***www.netscape.co.uk***
OPERA	★★★★☆	Faster than IE or Netscape	Bit of a stickler for standards	***www.opera.com***
SURF MONKEY	★★★★★	Lots of fun – blowing up sites is great	'Unavailable - being upgraded'	***www.surfmonkey.com***

MAC BROWSERS

ICAB	★★★★☆	Fast. Gets rid of irritating ad banners	Could support more features	***www.icab.de***
INTERNET EXPLORER 5.0	★★★★★	State-of-the-art browsing on the Mac	Can be memory-hungry	***www.microsoft.com/Mac/ie***
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★★	Runs IE close; looks can be themed	Current test versions not as stable as IE	***www.netscape.com***

Send and receive email

EMAIL: THE STUFF THAT HAS THE Royal Mail quivering in its boots (after all, who sends letters any more?). But before you can enjoy the visceral thrills of sending mail instantly through cyberspace (80 per cent of email apparently makes it to its recipient within five minutes) you'll need an address and a means of sending and receiving your post.

The former you can get either by signing up with an Internet Service Provider (or ISP, see page 124), getting one from your employer (many firms now have big networks and will afford you a name as part of the job), or through one of the web-based email service providers (such as Yahoo!, Hotmail, excite *etc*). But what are the pros and cons of each option?

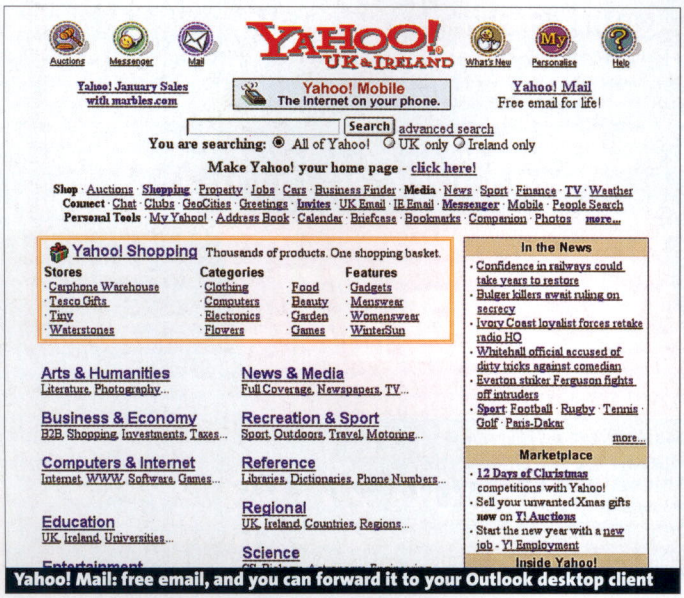
WEB-BASED EMAIL Dead handy if you travel a lot; once you have your password after signing up, you can check your mail from any Internet café or any place with a Net-linked PC. Some web-based email service providers even offer the facility to forward and send mail through such desktop software as Microsoft Outlook or Eudora. The catch? Many have a rather clumsy interface, and sending and receiving mail can be slow, especially when America wakes up in the morning and logs on. Make sure you keep a duplicate of your address book and favourites on your hard drive, otherwise if your web-based account goes down, so do all your contact details. If you fancy checking it out, you can start an account at ***www.yahoo.co.uk***, or head along to ***www.hotmail.com*** or ***www.excite.co.uk***.

YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER When you sign up with an ISP, you'll be given at least one email address to use, and most will even provide the email software you need to get started (usually Outlook, although do remember that you're rarely stuck with it – you can choose between the leading packages outlined to in the column to the right). The catch? You may find it difficult to read email from these accounts at your workplace, unless you can be bothered to manually forward mail for the next day, that is.

YOUR EMPLOYER This usually means using the software the firm provides (invariably the networked version of Outlook), and you can't access your email from home using your own PC (unless your bosses love you enough to set you up there as well). The upside? It's probably all free of charge – and who doesn't like a free lunch?

£ SAVING TIPS

A pay-as-you-go tariff means you spend the moment you log on. So don't. Write your mail offline, log on and send it all at once. Watch those attachments; large images, sound files or documents will take time to go through the pipe. Try to keep mail below 750K in size, and use compression software ('zip' or 'stuff' files). Most email clients set a limit of around 2MB – any larger and it'll bounce straight

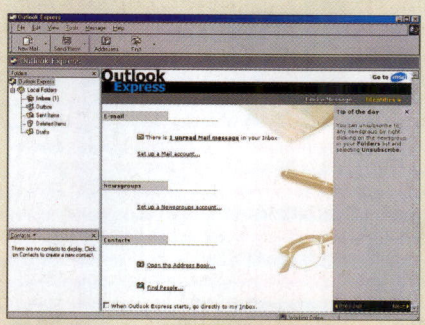


Yahoo! Mail: free email, and you can forward it to your Outlook desktop client

ARE THE RIGHT PEOPLE HANDLING YOUR POST?

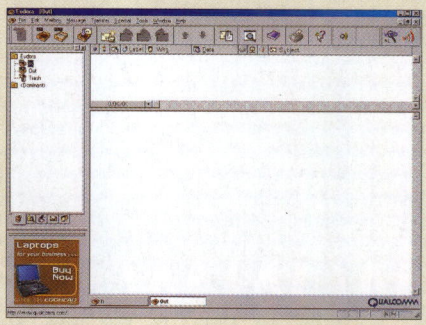
EMAIL CLIENTS>>

Microsoft Outlook Express 5 ★★★★☆



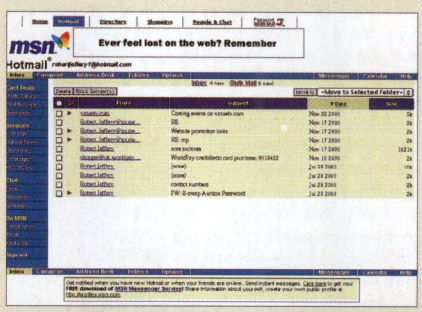
If your PC came with IE5+, you're most likely already using Express 5. And that's a good thing: the latest Outlook is easy to use and set-up, and now features such useful extras as Hotmail support (you can download your Hotmail messages for working offline, or synch your HotMail and Express address books). And with so many families now having individual email addresses, Outlook makes setting up individual accounts fuss free. Available for both PC and Mac, the download is at ***www.microsoft.com/windows/oe***

Eudora 5.0 ★★★★★



Launched back in September, the latest Eudora is available in Paid ($49.95), Sponsored and Light modes. Both of the latter can be grabbed free from ***www.eudora.com***. While Light is stripped down, Sponsored features ads (see picture, right). Either way, the Eudora package is excellent; the interface is attractive and intuitive, while the package integrates well with the address book. 5.0 even includes a novel 'MoodWatcher' – a feature than affords mail a 'red chilli pepper' rating according to the strength of its 'inflamatory' language!

MSN Hotmail ★★★★☆



The web-based service that got the whole ball rolling. Sign up for a free account, and get an email address and a password. There's a 2Mb limit on your inbox, and an Inbox Protector to fight off spam mail. The Hotmail Alert service will notify your pager or mobile phone of incoming messages. Sign up at ***www.hotmail.com***, or try ***www.yahoo.co.uk*** or ***www.excite.co.uk*** instead; the services are all similar.

Netscape Mail ★★★★☆

Now bundled in with the new Netscape 6 browser, Mail runs Outlook Express neck-and-neck; as with the Microsoft product, there's full integration with its built-in address book. True to the philosophy of the 6 browser, the themed Mail interface tries to pack in as much 'user friendliness' as possible. The 'My Sidebar' feature, for example, is carried over from the browser, so you can keep your instant messaging buddy list in sight, and even the latest news.

all the results

faster

www.clubcall.com

breaking news
exclusive interviews

interactive competitions
and chat

authoritative content
on 92 clubs

Club Call

www.clubcall.com

football down the line

For information on our telephone service call 08000 27 99 27

Visit ITV Teletext page 524.

thus

Image supplied by Action Images.

Online chat

How to hold virtual conversations with friends and strangers, experts and celebrities

Online chat lets you communicate with other people, often in real time. In other words, you type in comments, send them over the Net and they're seen almost immediately. And you're only paying for a local phone call, even if you are 'talking' to someone on the other side of the world.

You can 'chat' with friends and relatives in other countries without running up massive phone bills. Or join in an online discussion on your favourite subject with an expert .

There's the opportunity to ask a celebrity questions during a moderated 'conference', or talk to complete strangers on the other side of the world.

'Smileys' are a way of including an indication of emotion in your messages. They are useful when, for example, you are making a joke and you want to be sure that the recipient realises you're not being serious. Hang a relevant smiley on the end of your sentence by typing in the relevant characters, but do try not to over-use them. To 'read' them, just turn the page 90 degrees to the left ;-) got it? Here are the four most used smileys:

- **:-)** The original smiley. Indicates a joke, or just a happy person!
- **;-)** Wink
- **:-o** Shock (an open mouth)
- **:-(** Unhappy

Don't register your details with a site unless you really want to. Often chat software will ask for your name and other info. Be wary; you don't know what it'll be used for.

If you are looking for romance online, use caution. Don't reveal your home address and if you decide to meet up, make sure someone knows where you're going, as you would if meeting someone from a magazine or newspaper ad.

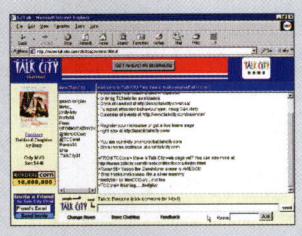
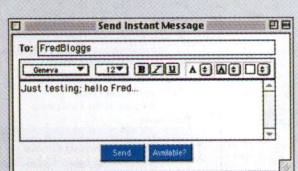
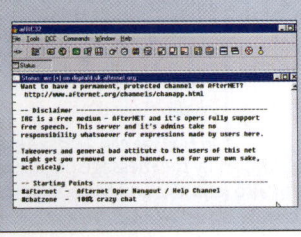
If text chat seems a bit flat, try 3D chat, where users take on a 'persona' and actually walk round chat rooms. Try ***www.virtualzones.com*** for starters.

£ SAVING TIPS

Save time while you're chatting online by using popular Internet abbreviations, like FYI (for your information), L (laughing), LOL (laughing out loud) and IMHO (in my humble opinion). For more examples, visit *tqjunior.thinkquest.org/4658/chat.htm*

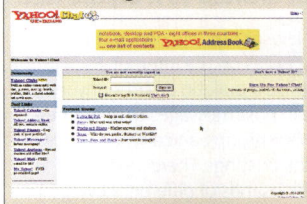
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD...

CHAT CHOICES>>

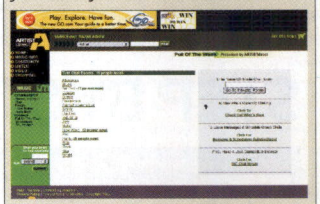
TYPE OF CHAT		FOR & AGAINST	CHAT LINK
LIVE ON A WEB SITE Takes place within the window of your browser on a Web site. Messages come up instantly and can be seen by everyone who is viewing that Web page.		**FOR** Easy to use; no extra software required to run it. **AGAINST** Works on someone's Web site, so the subject will be dictated by them and private chat is unlikely.	***www.talkcity.com*** Online community where you can talk on various subjects, including romance and current affairs.
MODERATED SESSIONS Moderated chats are 'supervised' by a chat room host, who decides whether or not to allow your comments or questions to be displayed. This is the norm for celebrity chats.		**FOR** Discussions are sensibly run. Abusive or annoying people may be screened out. **AGAINST** Only take place at certain times because they require a moderator to be present on the site. Censorship.	***www.chat.beeb.com*** The BBC's celebrity chat service with daily visits from the network's top stars.
REAL-TIME USING EXTRA SOFTWARE Software like AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ allow you to chat in real time. You don't use a Web browser; the software takes care of everything.		**FOR** Instant response; ability to chat privately to one person. **AGAINST** Requires extra software. Some firms don't allow this to be installed on their PCs, so you may not be able to chat at work.	***www.aol.co.uk/aim*** ***www.icq.com*** Chat one-to-one with your friends in real time on the Net.
IRC IRC (Internet Relay Chat) software lets you talk to many people at once. It can be a pain to use, however; it was, after all, modelled on CB radio.		**FOR** Useful, technical chats are often held on IRC channels. **AGAINST** Software is difficult to use; IRC users can be impatient with newcomers.	***www.mirc.com*** Although it can be tricky to get used to, mIRC is the best software for IRC chat. ***www.ircle.com*** IRC client for Macs.

RELATED CHAT SITES

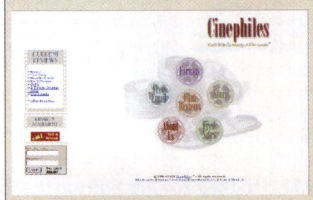
Explore some of the subjects featured in this month's *thenet* further through chat rooms...



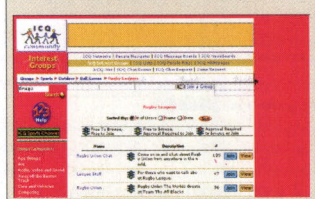
General ***uk.chat.yahoo.com***
Chat about anything that takes your fancy in Yahoo!'s chat rooms



Buying CDs p44 ***www2.imusic.com***
Find out what CDs are hot in iMusic's genre-specific chat rooms

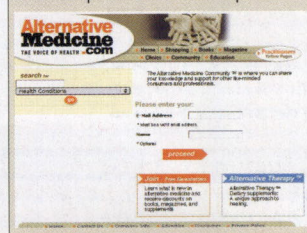


Films p68 ***www.cinephiles.net***
What do real film lovers think of *Hannibal*? Find out at Cinephiles



Rugby p72 ***groups.icq.com/Sports/groups.asp?with=524***
Chat with fellow RU fans

Learning online p88 ***www.kidocracy.com/cyberworld/index.html***
Helpful homework tips



Health p90 ***www.alternativemedicine.com/community.shtml***
Advice on alternative medicine

Newsgroups

Whatever topic tickles your fancy, they'll be a newsgroup dedicated to it on the Net. Here's how to join up

Newsgroups are one of the older services on the Internet. Each group is like a bulletin board – anyone can post messages to different newsgroups, and anyone can read the postings. There are tens of thousands of different newsgroup subjects available, so there will be one that matches your interests, whether you're looking for info on beekeeping or book-keeping, computers or comics, sewing or sailing.

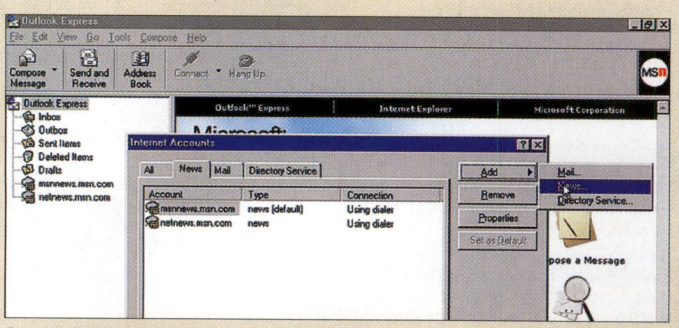
Although the Web has plenty of information on most subjects, newsgroups will often provide more detailed answers to questions. If you have a question on a specific subject, you can receive half a dozen responses in two hours.The most famous newsgroup system is Usenet. This is structured like a tree, with a few large branches and thousands of smaller ones. The large branches are top-level discussion categories, such as rec (recreaction), which contain smaller branches, such as rec.art. These categories contain messages themselves but are also broken down further into even more specific branches, such as rec.arts.comics, which contain messages from people who are interested in that topic.

If you don't want to go to the bother of configuring Outlook Express or other newsgroup access software, visit DejaNews ***www.deja.com*** – a Web-based interface to newsgroups. You can read and send messages from here, all via your Web browser. Simple.

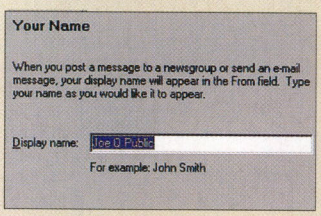
Your ISP will provide you with its own news server access, or visit ***esalesbiz.com/web/nntplst.htm*** which links to hundreds of free access news servers. To add more servers to Outlook Express, go through the setting-up steps outlined below.

ACCESSING NEWSGROUPS USING OUTLOOK EXPRESS

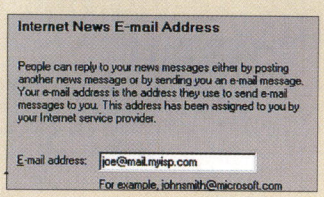
STEP BY STEP>>



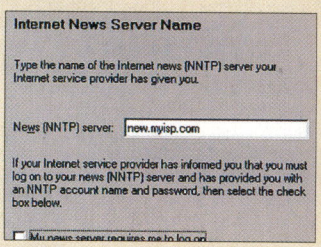
1 Go to the Accounts entry in the Tools menu, click on the News tab to list your current news accounts (if any), hit Add and choose News.



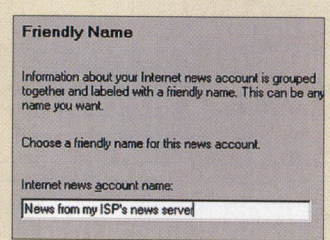
2 Type in your name. This will be displayed in any message you post to a newsgroup. Then hit Next.



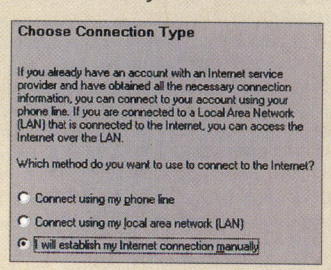
3 Type in your email address. This will be displayed in any message you post. Then click Next.



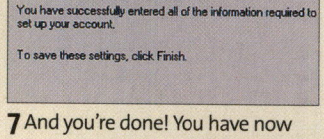
4 Enter the name of your ISP's server which should be given in your user documentation.



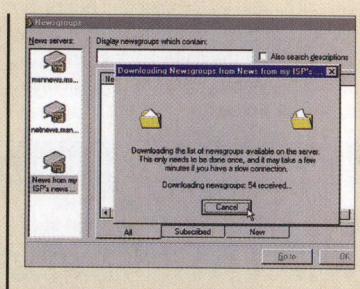
5 Give the news server a name that makes sense to you.



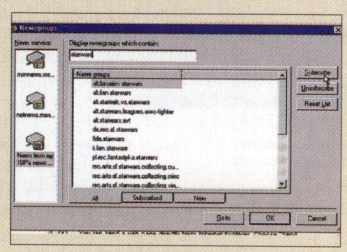
6 Tell Outlook Express that you will dial your ISP manually before you start reading news.



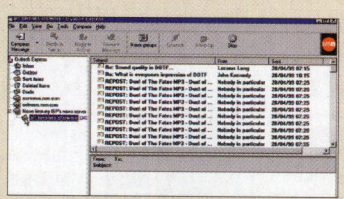
7 And you're done! You have now set up a newsgroup access account. Now let's see how to use it.



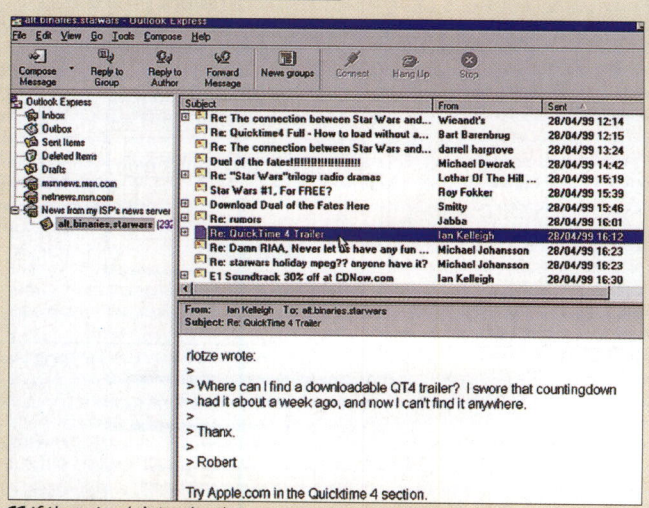
8 After hitting Close, you're asked if you want to download your ISP's list of newsgroups. When you click Yes, the list will be downloaded, so make sure you're online. This can take up to 10 minutes when you first connect, because you are downloading the names of thousands of newsgroups.



9 Once all the newsgroups are downloaded, you can explore. If you want to find *Star Wars* postings, for example, type 'starwars' into the text field at the top of the window to display all newsgroups containing that word. You can subscribe to as many groups as you want.



10 To access a message inside a newsgroup, click on the subject header to read a summary. Double click the header and the whole message downloads, appearing on the lower half of the screen.



11 If there is a '+' sign by the message header this means there are replies which you can also read. Click on the '+' sign to see the list of replies.

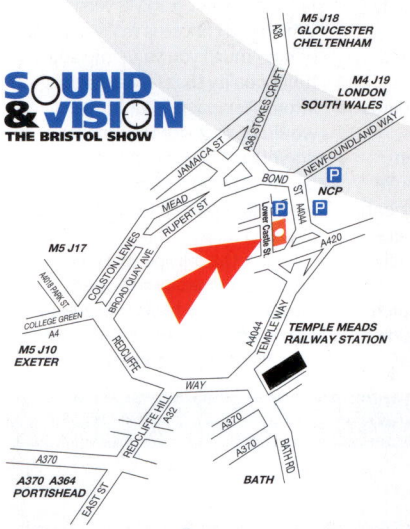
COUNTDOWN TO

23 - 25 February 2001

10am - 5pm every day at the Marriott Hotel, Lower Castle St., Bristol

GETTING TO THE SHOW

By train: Temple Meads Station is a short distance from the Marriott and is accessible by bus, foot or taxi.
By car: from the M4 take J19 (M32 – Bristol). Follow signs for City Centre and RAC signs to the Show.



Easy local parking in Broadmead, Bond Street and Tollgate NCPs.

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DYNAUDIO: the new Audience series will be making its UK debut
ELAC: four new IMAGO NXT™ flat panel speakers
MISSION: the new FS series of speakers - the ultra flat home cinema package using NXT™ technology
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For the very latest information check

http://www.bristolshow.co.uk

TESTED BROWSERS

Opera 5.01

At last – the browser the pros use comes free of charge! But do the latest changes to Opera make it worth the switch?

Web users are a spoilt bunch these days. No sooner does Microsoft offer the spectacular 5.5 version of its Explorer browser than Netscape fights back with its all-new 6 (see the net, February). And now the world's third choice of browser, Opera, has pitched into the battle by both improving its browser and – wait for it – going free of charge to boot.

Well, kind of. Download Opera 5.0 from ***www.opera.com*** and it will come in Sponsored mode. Yes, like Eudora and its richly praised v5.0 email client, the Opera browser now features tactically chosen ads according to your 'profile' (ie tell them who you are and how much you earn, and the adverts that should most 'appeal' are popped into the frame).

You can, however, choose to switch the ads off, but in doing so it reverts to 'Paid' mode – at which point you'll need to stump up $39 if you want to continue using the software. So ads it'll be, then.

WHY OPERA?

But let's begin at the beginning. Like why would you want to ditch your current version of Explorer or Netscape? After all, although browser usage surveys are notoriously unreliable, Opera has attracted under one percent of the world's browser users.

There are, of course, good reasons for this. Take Explorer: it now comes bundled with most new PCs and ISP packages – you get it whether you like it or not.

And since most people are too nervous to switch browsers, Microsoft has snatched an enormous market lead (depending on who you believe, Explorer enjoys anywhere between 70 and 90 percent of the market).

In other words, usage need not be a reflection of excellence. If you need further proof, just look at the aforementioned Eudora Mail client – while it is undoubtedly the equal of Microsoft's Outlook Express 5 in every way, it just doesn't get bundled with every PC sold. And like Eudora, Opera has long enjoyed the reputation of being the canny professional's choice.

'Opera takes disabled users seriously, with full keyboard operation'

Why? Primarily because it is quick, stable and complies with Internet standards – all factors that are vital for a satisfying Web experience (even more important, arguably, if you're in the business of site development). And in going free of charge, Opera has added 'adaptable' and 'friendly' to its armoury.

Take the introduction of a search facility built into the toolbar. Aside from being a good thing in itself, Opera has also been prudent enough to choose the excellent Google ***(www.google.com)*** engine as the default.

And if you're a fan of Instant Messaging, 5.01 has the Mirabilis ICQ client built in, enabling you to chat with friends worldwide in real time. Signing up for an account is the work of minutes.

Even the download is fairly friendly. Visit ***www.opera.com*** and you'll be faced with two choices – a non-Java 2MB download and a Java-complaint 9.29MB version. Which you choose is really a matter of how much you value the added functionality that Java applets afford Web pages. Our advice would be to go for the smaller download – if you're disappointed by the experience, you can always grab a Java plug-in from the Web at a later stage.

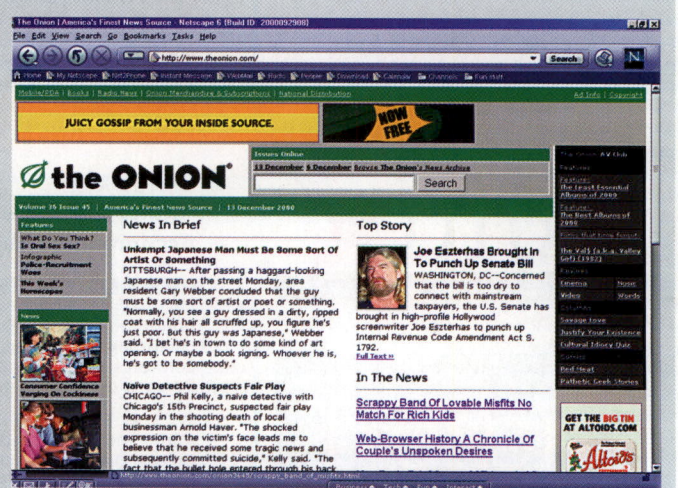
In fact, the only people who will be disappointed by the Opera proposition will be Mac users: an Apple-ready version of the browser is on the way, but today the

HOW DOES OPERA COMPARE WITH THE CURRENT CHAMPS?

THE BROWSERS OPERA 5.01 HAS TO BEAT>>

EXPLORER 5.5 ★★★★ Microsoft's finest enjoys an estimated 90 percent of the global browser market, and in this case deservedly so – it's fast, stable and ever-so user-friendly

www.microsoft.com/windows/ie



NETSCAPE 6 ★★★★ The recently-launched all-new Netscape gives Explorer a sound run for its money. Quick, smart and capable of personalisation, 6's only mistake is abuse its remit to drive users back into the Netscape sites a little too liberally

www.netscape.co.uk

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH YOUR NEW BROWSER

AT A GLANCE»

SPONSORED MEANS ADS
Download for free, and your browser comes with 'strategic' ads. You can switch 'em off, but then there's a bill for $39 if you want to carry on using Opera

IT'S ALL ABOUT SPEED
Toggle between images and no images, between user settings and those of the document – all in the name of going faster

BUILT-IN SEARCH
Toolbar search defaults to the excellent Google engine, but you're also given a wide choice of engines via a drop-down menu

INSTANT BLOW-UPS
Aimed at aiding the visually impaired, pages can be magnified by up to 1000 percent

development is merely at Alpha (ie non-public) stage.

SETTING UP

Download completed, you can begin using the browser in earnest. And there comes the first surprise – while Netscape and Explorer bear a family resemblance to each other in their basic framework, Opera offers some genuine twists, many aimed at making navigation of the Web faster and easier (no surprise when you discover that the Oslo-based company's tagline is 'the fastest browser on earth).

For example, of the four small buttons sat alongside the address bar, two are dedicated to helping you go faster – one shows the page without images, while the other switches between 'document' and 'user' mode (letting you see the page how the designer intended it or how you'd like it to be).

The other two buttons handle print preview (how the page will look on paper presented within the browser frame) and security (indicating the page's state of secure encryption).

Little surprises over and done with, you can go to File > Preferences and begin customising Opera. This includes the ability to set your own fonts, switch off images for faster browsing, and even input your personal details for automatic form filling. Oh, and it's here that you complete your 'profile' for the Sponsored mode ads.

IN USE

After a week's solid browsing, we can confirm that Opera 5.01 is as stable as sure-footed as its predecessor's. Pages appear quickly (subjectively as fast if not faster than in Explorer) and look good. Which is not to say that the browser is without its foibles; hit 'return' after typing in an address and the URL you've requested vanishes, to be replaced by a series of download indicators (including, bravely, a timer). The problem here is that, should you grow tired of waiting, you're prevented from typing another address. Now we know that you only have to hit the back button, but when you're really surfing fast...

On the subject of which, the smart search facility is, well, smart. Each search engine is afforded a letter coding – all you need do is tap the letter into the address bar followed by your subject (for example, 'a cars' will search AltaVista for all car-related material). And that's without resorting to the search built into the toolbar, which we found invaluable (it defaults to Google, but can be set to via a drop-down menu to AltaVista, GoTo... indeed, pretty much any engine you like).

ADVANCED TIPS

As a company, Opera makes much of its appeal to minorities. Go to the default bookmarks supplied with the browser and you'll find an entire section dedicated to sites supporting the disabled community. This is much more than a token gesture: the browser is fully operable from your keyboard alone via a host of shortcut keys, negating the need for a mouse. And there's even a page within ***www.opera.com*** from which you can download foreign languages for use in the browser – although when we visited, the options were limited to English, Swedish and Dutch! The Oslo-based company is also currently involved in Project Dart, the aim of which is to add Celtic languages to the menu.

VERDICT ★★★★★

We've tried long and hard to think of a reason not to switch from Explorer or Netscape to Opera, and we admit that we're struggling. The adverts in the Sponsored version are only a minor distraction (you may, of course, think otherwise), and the pay-off is a Web browser that's fast, glitch-free and highly adaptable.
www.opera.com

Build a pro site in 30 minutes!

Design novice? HTML virgin? No worries. You, too, can have an impressive web presence...

PIGEON FANCIER? KYLIE devotee? Pickled herring addict? Whatever tickles your fancy, it's never been easier to share your passion through a Web site of your own.

Web space isn't a problem: if your ISP hasn't given you enough megs to let your imagination run riot, you can sign up for free extra space with the likes of ***1oobest-free-web-space.com***.

As for designing your site, gone are the days when you'd have to learn HTML or get to grips with complex Web design packages. All you have to do is drop your words of wisdom into ready-made templates and post them at the click of a button. The problem was that most templates are just too basic and your site ends up looking sadly amateur.

It's a different story entirely with Moonfruit (***www.moonfruit.com***). Its selection of professional-looking backgrounds, page templates and features – all powered by Flash – let you build a professional-standard site in the time it takes to watch *EastEnders*. And it's less traumatic.

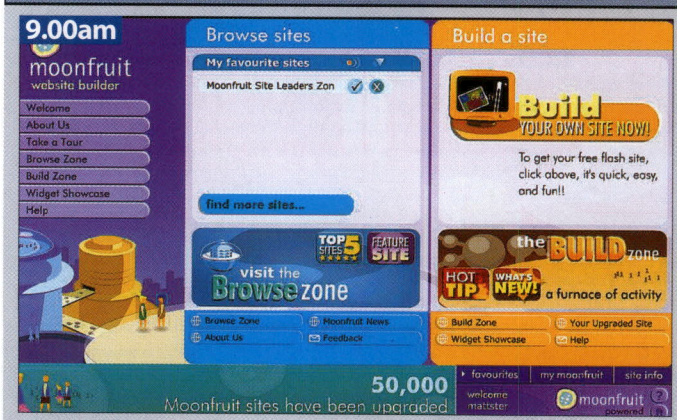
9.00am Moonfruit doesn't hang about. As soon as you log into its site, you are immediately given the option to Build Your Own Site Now. Click on it and you're transported straight into the first steps of the procedure.

9.01am Moonfruit starts by asking you what your site will be about. It's not just making polite conversation: your subject matter will influence the whole style of the site and will determine what you do with the elements that are already set up on the page template. We are going to choose a gaming site to show off the console reviews we had in our January issue. Once you've identified the subject matter for your site, hit Next.

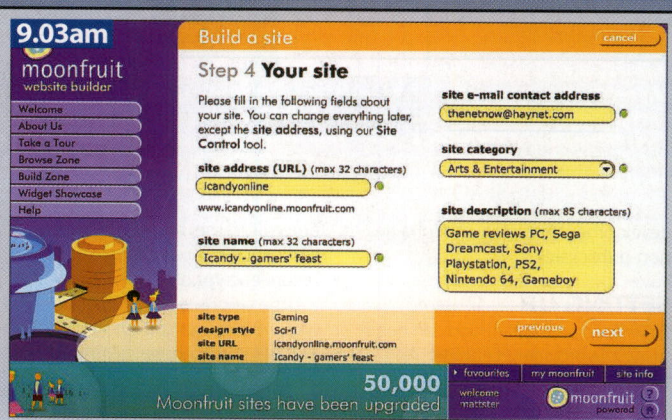
9.02am Now the fun really starts: you get to choose a design for your site. This will dictate the overall look and feel of the site and with the selection on offer, there's bound to be something that fits the bill. We're choosing a sci-fi template to give our gaming page a futuristic feel. If you're less than keen on your chosen design once it's on the page, don't fret; you can change it later on.

9.03am At this stage, you'll be asked to register with Moonfruit, or check your details if you are already a member, before you can go any further. After that, you have to enter

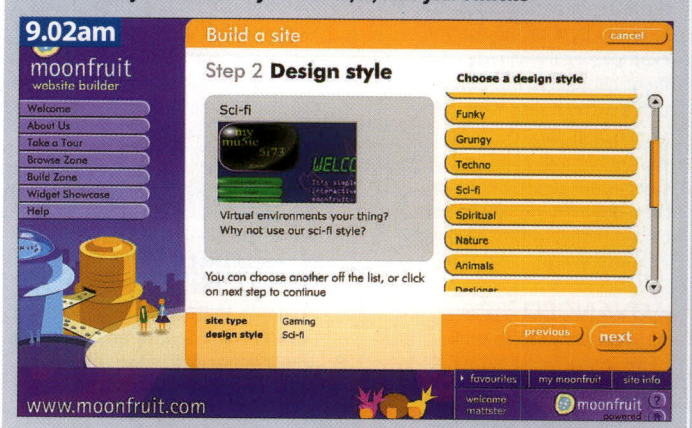
THERE'S MORE TO BROWSERS THAN EXPLORER AND NETSCAPE



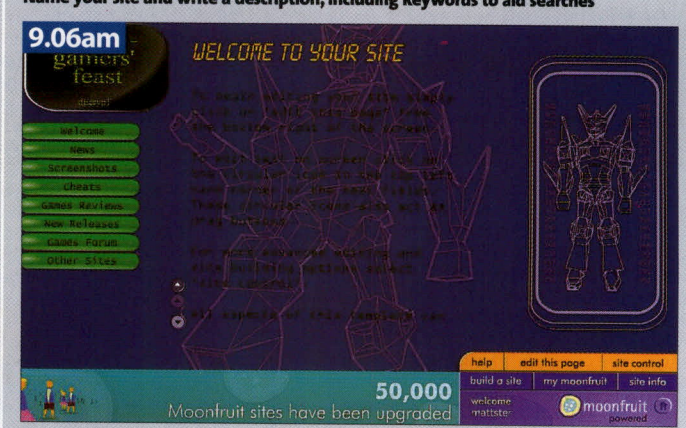
Click on 'Build your own site' if you want to, er, build your own site



Name your site and write a description, including keywords to aid searches



Choose an overall design that ties in with the subject matter of your Web site



The first glimpse of the site-to-be, already looking rather dapper and professional

a few more details about your site. Don't cut corners; it's important that you give all the information asked for. The first is the site name, which can be up to 32 letters long and gives give you an address looking something like this: ***www.upto32lettershere.moonfruit.com.*** If the name has already been taken, the next screen lets you know and gives you the chance to try another. After you've chosen your URL, you type in your site name and choose a category from the pull-down menu. This helps pigeonhole your site and make it easier for likeminded folks to find.

The next bit to fill in is the site description. You get up to 85 words to do it with, but make sure you include keywords about your site, because they will be added to search engines so people out there can find you, which is the whole point of building the site in the first place.

9.04am Next it's the obligatory legal stuff. Give the Terms and Conditions the once-over; they contain rules both about posting information and your general conduct on Moonfruit. If you agree, click on the button. If not, you'd better bail out now.

9.05am Our first choice of address has already gone, but we don't care. Oh no. We'll just change it to something else. So there.

9.06am As soon as you've got yourself a name that's available, your site is created and you can begin editing it, or go back to My Moonfruit and visit any favourite sites you've listed or start from scratch, for that matter. We take a look at the site in its embryonic state. It already looks really professional and we haven't even added content yet. The menu on the left is nice and clear, and clicking on an item on it rotates the robot on the right while the page is loading. Remember that each theme throws up a different design and we've only got this nifty robot because we chose the sci-fi design.

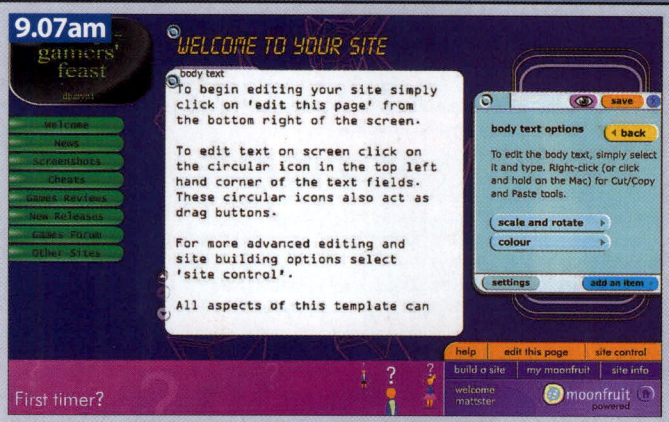
9.07am Because you are logged in as the site leader, you get an additional menu at the bottom right of the page, including buttons for Help, Edit This Page and Site Control. Broadly speaking, the page editing tool lets you to work on the content of that particular page, while the Site Control tool lets you make site-wide

Gone are the days when you had to get to grips with HTML

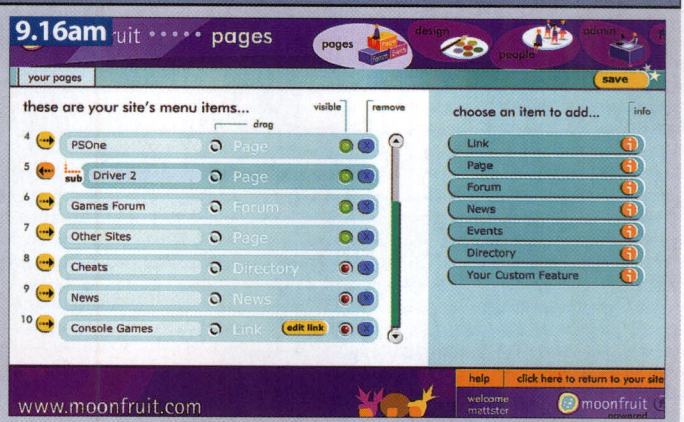
changes to things like design, security, member management and structure. Looking at our site, for starters we have a page of text on our Welcome page that can't be read. We're going to change this to a message telling visitors what the site is all about, as well as changing its colour so it shows up against the background. To do this, click on Edit This Page, which brings up the Page Editor window. Click on the circle in the top-left of the window to move it around the screen, which is how you move most elements within Moonfruit.

To edit an item, select it by clicking on its circle. We're editing the text, so we click its circle to highlight the box and change the options on the Page Editor window.

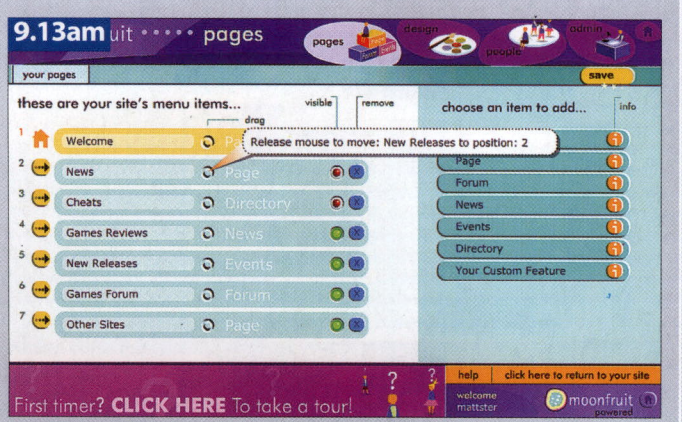
9.08am Having selected the text in the box, we replace it by typing in the message we want our Welcome page to show. If you've prepared some text in Word and are having trouble pasting them in, right-click with the mouse and choose Paste from the drop-down menu. Once you're happy with the text, you can make the whole box bigger or smaller by changing the scale, or you can rotate the box. You can also change the colour by selecting the text with the mouse and using the palette to pick a new hue. Clicking on the eye icon in the Page Editor window shows you what the page looks like with the



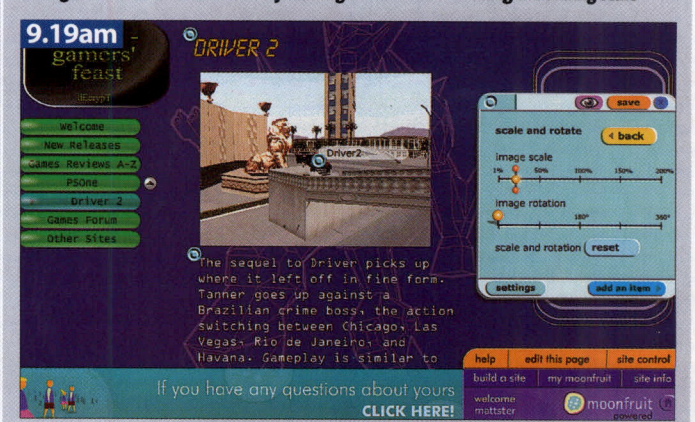
Over-type the dummy text with your own message of welcome



Change the size of a screenshot by clicking on its circle and using the sliding scale



Rearranging the menu is a simple matter of dragging the items into position



The first review, in place and sized to fit, will be listed in the Games Reviews A-Z

changes. If you're pleased with the result, hit Save. If you've made a bit of a mess of things, just click on the X button to go back to the original page. Don't hit Save.

9.11am Now we want to change the title at the top of the page. It's done in the same way as changing the Welcome text: click on Edit This Page, click the circle to choose the title box, highlight and over-type the text with your title.

9.12am Next, we're going to change the menu. There are a few items we don't want to include yet, such as news and cheats. We also want to get rid of Screenshots, because they're going to go next to reviews. To do this, click on the Site Control button and choose Pages. For the News and Cheats menu items, click on the button marked Visible to remove them from view. This allows you to replace them again quickly at a later date. Since we don't need the Screenshots menu button here, we permanently remove it by hitting the X button and deleting it. Hit the 'Click here to return to your site' button at the bottom-right corner of the screen when you're satisfied with your modified menu and choose

If you've made a bit of a mess of things, just click on the X button

Save from the pop-up menu. The site's powered by Flash, so the menu is the most important feature, as people logging into your site won't be able to use the Front and Back buttons on their browsers.

9.13am While we're in the Site Control tool, we're going to add a few menu items and modify some existing ones. To move New Releases further up the menu so it sits above Game Reviews, click on the 'drag' circle and push the mouse up to the higher position.

9.14am To add another item to the menu, click on Page in the 'Choose an item to add' menu at the right of the page. Give the page a name – we're going to call ours PSOne – and click on OK. Move it to another position in the menu in the same way as we moved New Releases.

9.15am Go back to your homepage and click on the newly-created PSOne link to launch the Page Set-Up Wizard. Choose what type of page you want it to be and whether you want to copy the contents of an existing page. For ease's sake, we're just going to copy the Welcome page and then change the text on it.

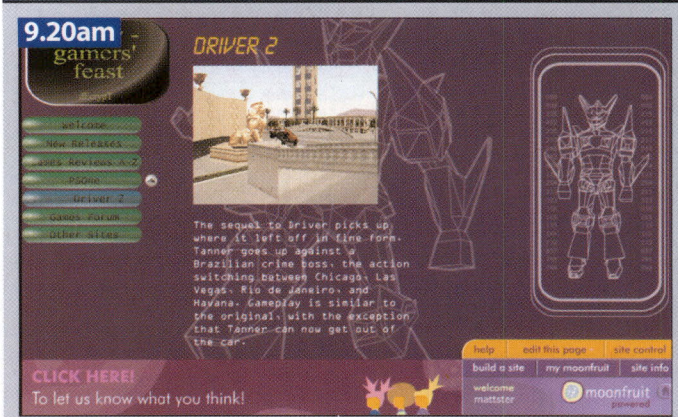
9.16am While you're here, you have the power to decide who can see the page: just you, just your members or any old Joe (or Josephine for that matter).

For our purposes, this page will contain a short blurb about the console itself, the actual game reviews will appear as sub-directories off the PSOne link in the menu. To create these, follow the steps for creating a new menu item. As you can see, we've set up a page for the PlayStation version of Driver 2. To make this page a sub-directory of the PSOne link, move it in the Site Control section so that it's under the PSOne page. Then click on the orange arrow in front of Driver 2.

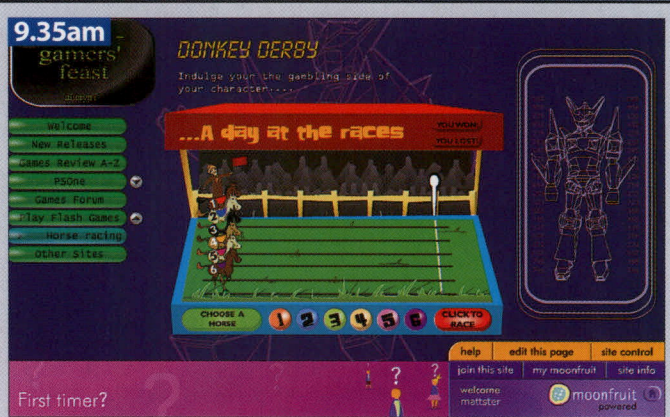
9.17am Returning to the site, there's now an arrow next to PSOne on the menu. Clicking on this reveals the Driver 2 link and will show any other links we add as sub-directory pages. Click on the Driver 2 link to go into the Page Set-Up Wizard. We've chosen a blank page this time, which has the same two elements as the Homepage. As well as adding a title and review text in the same way as we did earlier, we're also adding a screenshot. Note that any pictures you add to Moonfruit must be in the JPEG format.

To add a picture, first you've got to get that picture onto Moonfruit's servers. To do this, go into Edit This Page and select Add An Item. Choose Image from the options and select Upload a New File. You then browse

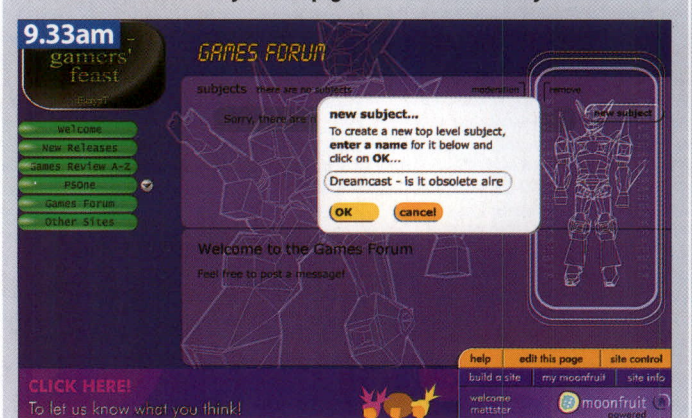
THERE'S MORE TO BROWSERS THAN EXPLORER AND NETSCAPE



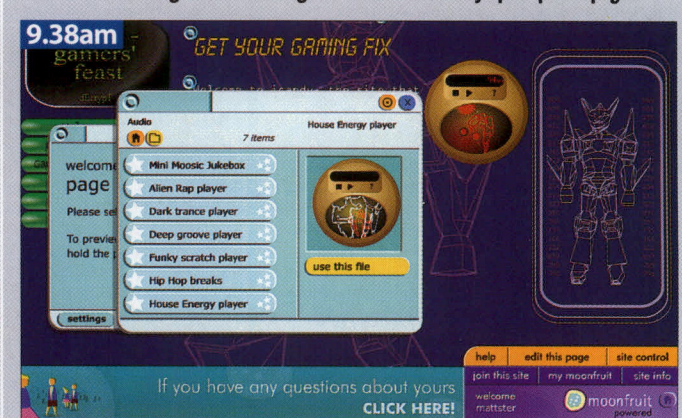
The Site Control section lets you make pages into sub-directories of your links



How about choosing some music to greet visitors when they open specific pages?



Click on the new subject button to start a topic in the chat room



Moonfruit's funky widgets include Flash games to spice up your site

your hard drive for the picture and rename it if you wish. Once that's done, go back to your editing Window and click OK; then choose the file and add it to the page.

9.19am The screenshot from Driver 2 has appeared on our page okay, but it's way too big. The solution is to click on its circle and choose Scale and Rotate from the edit window. This lets us slide the orange dot down the scale to make the picture smaller.

9.20am By now we've got our first review posted and we're free to add more to the site. Each game page needs to be a sub-directory of the platform it runs on and listed in alphabetical order – using the Site Control section – so they're easier for people to find. We've already got a review up, so we add a listing for it in the Game Reviews A-Z section of our site, as well as to the calendar of New Releases.

9.23am
With a review and screen shot up on the site for all to see, it's time for a cuppa. Boil a kettle of water and pour into a cup containing a teabag. Remove the teabag when suitably brewed and add milk and sugar, as required. Return, with your mug of steaming tea and possibly a Jammy Dodger or two, to a seat in front of the computer and admire your handiwork for a while.

9.33am Remove any biscuit crumbs from clothing and get ready to have fun with the flashier elements. For starters, our game site came with a Games Forum link as standard, so we kick off a new topic by clicking on the New Subject button at the top-right of the screen and tapping in a title or question. Pushing the button for moderation means that, as site moderator, all new posts will have to be checked by you before they are shown. Oh, the power, the power.

9.35am Other nifty features, or 'widgets' as those in the know call them, are yours to command by choosing Edit This Page and clicking on Image. Select 'Our Images and Widgets' and you'll be presented with a number of options, including a postcard for visitors to email to their friends, Flash games and loads more cool stuff. We've included a horse racing game on our site because, well, we could.

Remove the teabag when brewed and add milk and sugar

9.38am Jazz things up a bit more by adding sound, using one of the music files already loaded on the Moonfruit servers. In the Our Images and Widgets, section click on Audio and choose a music file to play when a certain page is opened. If your site visitors don't like it, they have the option to turn it off. We've chosen a file that plays techno music, to complement our site's sci-fi backgrounds.

9.40am And that's the site up and running. There's loads more ways to spruce it up, but there's no rest for the wired and the priority now we've got the basic structure figured out is to get cracking on the content. Once we've added the rest of the PlayStation games and the offerings from all the other consoles it'll be a comprehensive resource for gamers. Check out the fruit of our labours by visiting our Web site at ***www.icandyworld.moonfruit.com.***

HELP & ADVICE

Want more advice on building a Web site? The Moonfruit team and other site leaders offer their tips and recommendations at ***www.buildzone.moonfruit.com.*** If you get stuck during the basic design process, hit the Help button at the bottom right of the page. If you're still absolutely stumped and banging your head against the wall, email your questions to Moonfruit's troubleshooters at ***help@moonfruit.com***.

Result! All you've got to do now is enter the rest of your content and list it in the appropriate subdirectories

Q&A

Can't get the Internet to work the way you'd like? Our team of hardened Net-heads are at your beck and call

The sender of the month's Good Question wins a Casio TV1800 Pocket Television, worth £129.99

WORTH UPGRADING BROWSERS?

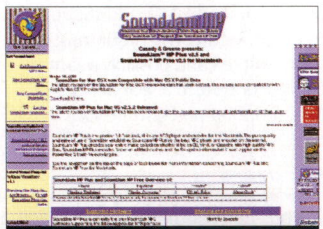
Netscape and Internet Explorer both have new versions of their browsers out, but is it worth upgrading yet as many Web sites say they are best read using the earlier versions?
MAX BARNARD, HAMPSHIRE

There's a simple explanation as to why many sites claim to be best viewed with earlier versions of Explorer or Navigator: the Webmasters haven't updated their sites since they checked them using last year's software. That doesn't mean you'll have problems viewing them with your up-to-date browser, as both Explorer and Navigator are fully 'backwards compatible' – in other words they'll happily read sites optimised for any previous version. And, of course, you'll be able to take advantage of all the bells and whistles built in to sites designed for the latest browsers.

IS IT ILLEGAL?

I have a number of MP3s on my computer so I can listen to them without needing the CDs to hand. Am I breaking the law, since I've paid for the originals?
SIMON BENNETT, LINCS

Technically, yes – the law plainly states that you can't duplicate an artist's copyrighted material, despite the fact that you've paid for it. But even the music industry admits the law is unenforceable, and upcoming EC legislation will enable you to make up to three copies of each of your tracks on another media, as long as it's for personal use. 'One for his MP3 player, one for her MP3 player and one for the car,' goes the logic. What you're not allowed is to use these recordings for public performance without paying a royalty fee, which is why ageing rock stars still get cheques from radio stations playing their material. And, obviously, listening to MP3s of copyright-controlled tracks you've acquired for free is illegal – although



soundjam.com: **MP3 files for the Mac**

if the boys in blue started enforcing that particular law, half the country would be behind bars.

IS THERE A DUAL FORMAT MP3 PLAYER?

I have a G3 Mac and a Windows 98 laptop. Can you recommend an MP3 player for both formats?
ROBERT SUMPTER, SCUNTHORPE

MP3 is a 'lossy' format, which means that a lot of the extra audio pleasure you'd expect a top-end hi-fi system to be able to extract has actually been discarded as part of the compression process. As a result, just about all MP3 playback software is of the same quality – and it's why most of it is free. The differences come in the efficiency with which the software sorts and stores your music, and the extra tools it provides to record MP3s and catalogue music via the Net. SoundJam creates and plays back great MP3 files for the Mac, and if you're online it will use the CDDB Web site to index your tracks; it costs around £25 and is downloadable from ***www.soundjam.com***. For your laptop, try Microsoft's own Windows Media Player (***www.microsoft.com***) or Real's RealAudio player (***www.realnetworks.com***). There's plenty of freeware out there, so if you want to spend money buy a speaker system.

IT'S PERSONAL

A lot of Web sites ask for personal information before they'll let me in. What are they are doing with this info and who else could it go to?
DAVID SIMPSON, VIA EMAIL

Technically you're covered by the Data Protection Act, which states that sites can't pass on the information you've given to anyone else without your permission. But don't be put off exploring sites for fear of your privacy being invaded – even if you forget to tick the 'no publicity' box, the worst that's likely to happen is that you start receiving junk email. Many experienced surfers maintain a Webmail address specifically to give when filling in the details asked by many sites; that way, spam doesn't start clogging up their regular email account. Webmail providers such as Yahoo! even offer to divert junk mail into a separate folder, so you don't even have to view it before deletion.

ALTERNATIVE HARD DRIVES?

I am looking to access the Internet using a set-top box or a console such

Upgrade to this new Netscape browser

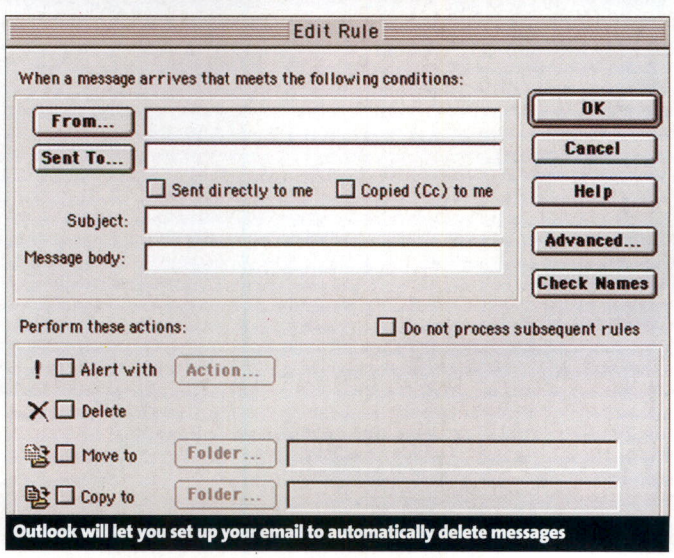
Q&A GOOD QUESTION

UNAUTHORISED TO UNSUBSCRIBE

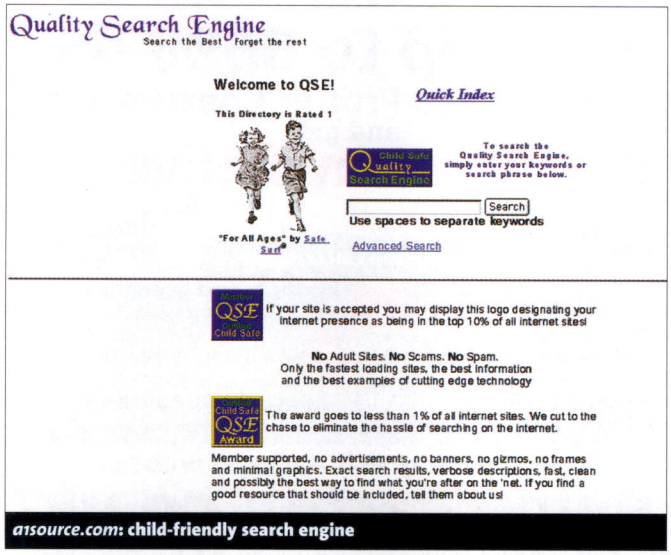
I signed up for a twice-daily newsletter but after a few weeks decided to unsubscribe. My email address is david.jones@icandy.co.uk, but I can also receive mail sent to dave.jones@icandy.co.uk and this is the address I gave. Because I am replying from the full address, it keeps telling me that I am not authorised to unsubscribe. What can I do?
DAVID JONES, VIA EMAIL

Services like these are usually automated. The reason your attempts to unsubscribe are being ignored is most likely a built-in security feature – the automatic system will only allow the person with a matching email address to change the subscription. To solve this problem try emailing the site's authors directly, and they might be able to bypass the automatic system and remove you. If they can't or won't remove you, you can set up your email to look for the mail as it comes in and delete it. In Outlook/Outlook Express go to the Tools Menu and choose Inbox Assistant. Choose the Add Rule option and put in the details of the email address it comes from or the subject line it displays and tick the box for Delete.

Send questions to the above addresses for a chance to win a Casio TV1800



Outlook will let you set up your email to automatically delete messages



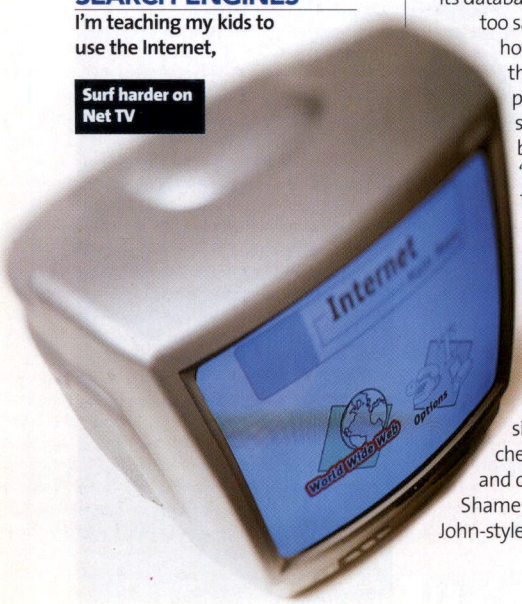
***a1source.com*: child-friendly search engine**

as a Dreamcast or PlayStation 2. None of these seem to have a hard drive, so you can't store anything or upgrade the browser. Is there any way around this?
PAUL RATCLIFFE, SURREY

The last year has seen a whole host of alternatives to using a big old computer to get online, including games consoles, digital TV services and Bush's Internet TV set. The problem is that none of these machines come with any form of re-writable storage medium – tech-speak for a hard disk or memory chip – which means that you're stuck with whatever software has been pre-loaded into the memory. So there's no way to download and store files, or update the supplied browser. The only solution in sight is offered by Bush, which is promising to release a hard drive for its popular Net TV models. Keep an eye on its Web site (***www.bushinternet.com***) for pricing and availability details.

CHILD-FRIENDLY SEARCH ENGINES

I'm teaching my kids to use the Internet,



Surf harder on Net TV

Surf cleanly with Net Nanny

especially to search for information to help with their homework. I've noticed that searching for quite innocent things can bring up lists of sites containing pornographic material, sometimes because of the different connotations of words and sometimes for no reason at all. Is there a way to filter out these kind of sites myself or is there a search engine that will do it automatically?
SUE PRICE, BERKS

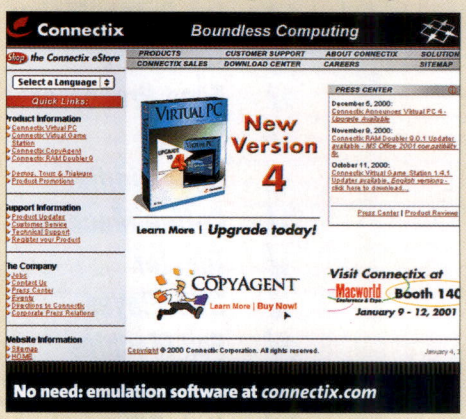
You can buy filtering software such as Net Nanny (***www.netnanny.com***), which checks the words and Web sites your kids are typing in against its database and rejects anything too salacious. Be warned, however, that it's something of a hit-and-miss procedure: it might ban a site on British birds because it's got the word 'tit' in it, while letting through some of the more ingenious spellings used by pornographers. A better solution would be to encourage your kids to use a child-friendly search engine, such as ***www.a1source.com***. The sites it links to have been checked by human editors and certified child-safe. Shame about the Janet and John-style home page, though.

QUICK QUESTION TIME. FINGERS ON THE BUZZERS...

FAQs

>I am looking to buy a new modem to upgrade from my measly 28.8Kb connection rate, but don't know whether to go for an internal or external model. Which would you suggest? *S Peters*
There are fractional speed advantages in having an internal modem – as it's just a circuitboard that runs off your computer's existing power supply, meaning it's both a cheaper and a neater solution. However, unless you know a friendly – and cheap – computer expert, you'll need to be confident enough to crack open your machine to install the modem (which might invalidate your PC's warranty). If the thought of that sends a shiver up your spine, go external.

>My friends and I like to forward amusing attachments to each other, but I use a Mac and can't open any of the PC files that end in '.exe'. Is there any way to make these files run on a Mac? *Iain Welles*
There is – but it's no thing of beauty. You'll need to buy and install Windows emulation software such as Virtual PC (***www.connectix.com***), which will set you back over £100, then launch it to be able to run the files your mates keep spamming you with. All of which sounds like an awful lot of trouble to go to simply to view 'amusing' ads for Guinness you could have viewed on a Web site in the first place.



No need: emulation software at *connectix.com*

>How can I tell if a site is secure when I am shopping on the Internet? *Graham John*
Look for the locked padlock symbol in the bottom left of your window – this means you've logged on to a secure server and that any info you send will be encrypted. If it's a British site you're using, check that they're up to scratch by looking out for the Which? Web Trader mark. And *never* send your credit card details via email – you've no idea where they'll end up.

>My company has recently started monitoring staff emails to stop personal emails being sent on company time. If I use my Hotmail account to send emails, can they monitor the messages that I send? *Karen Williams*
That depends on two things: the way your computer is connected to the Internet, and the level of your company's paranoia. Many office workers use Web-based email accounts for personal correspondence – such as finding a new job! – as copies only exist on external machines, such as those used by the Webmail operator and your ISP, neither of which can legally disclose your data. However, many employees get online through their company's own servers and it's possible – although highly unlikely – that the boss could sift through the gigabytes of data those machines process to read your love letters. If you're really that concerned, nip out to an Internet cafe for lunch.

>I want to copy all of the bookmarks I have on my machine at work so I can put them on my PC at home. Is there a way of doing this so I don't have to cut and paste them all, as there are about 70 in total? *Carrie Greene*
If you've got Explorer running on both machines, this is a simple matter: just use the 'Export Favorites' command to save the lot on to a floppy disk. Download the Favtool.exe software from ***www.microsoft.com*** if necessary. But you mention Bookmarks, so it sounds as if your work computer is running Netscape. If that's the case, first find the Netscape-generated 'Bookmarks.html' file on your hard disk, then copy the file on to your home PC and simply add the file to Explorer's list of favourites.

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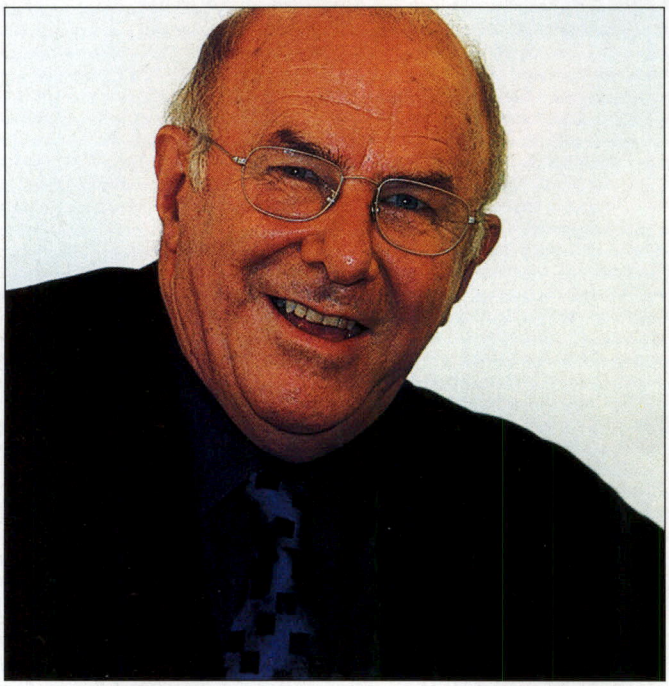

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURE: PA NEWS

Clive James

The acerbic Aussie is helping fellow Southern Hemisphere expats in Europe through a new site

When did you discover the Internet?
About three years ago someone started a site for my old friend Pete Atkin, so I looked it up for the lyrics I wrote 20 years ago. I was immediately captivated and started finding out what else the Internet could do.

What do you use the Net for?
I'm particularly interested in books – it's what I do for a living – so I got into Amazon and the second hand book sites. It's a powerful weapon in anyone's armoury.

How did you get involved with Welcome Stranger?
I started getting requests to stand in front of sites but no ideas looked sane until Welcome Stranger (***www.welcomestranger.com***), of which I'm now non-executive chairman. It's a sound business prospect which pays for itself; important in the current investment climate, because there is no investment climate. I had an idea the dot com bubble would burst – I could smell tulips.

What have you got planned for it?
Within the next month I'll start presenting a talk show on the site. Before anyone mentioned convergence I'd had the idea that one day you'd be able to broadcast through it – the shape of the screen's the same. I thought we might have to wait for broadband, but you can broadcast on narrowband if you don't mind a small picture. And nobody minds a small picture of me, it's the big pictures they mind...

What will the show consist of?
Fifteen minutes a week talking to camera about world events and being as interesting and funny as I can. It'll be something new, I don't think anyone's done it and you can do it from my living room with a couple of minicams. I want to make it literate and say all the things I could never say on television. And we can scale it up to talk to people, too.

Do you browse the Net with the same fascination you brought to *Clive James on TV*?
Oh sure, there's some crazy stuff you see. I'm very interested in chat rooms. On Midnight Voices, attached to Pete Atkin's site, fans of our work chat at a very high level. We'll use it at Welcome Stranger to sample opinion – it's much more efficient than market research in the street.

How useful is the Internet for travel?
It's extremely useful for finding out the stuff you need when you get there – visas, accommodation, jobs... if I'd had that information when I arrived here 40 years ago my life would have been very different. I wouldn't have spent two years starving, for instance. Our site helps with all kinds of information, and for that the Internet's unbeatable.

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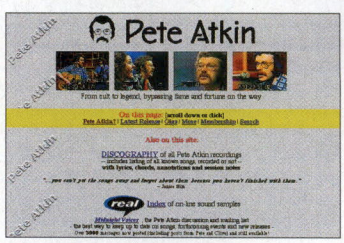

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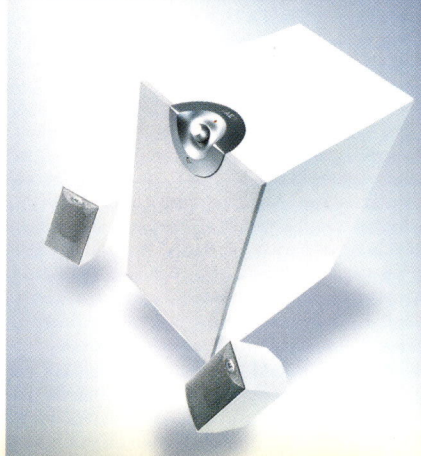

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